

आधुनिक भारत के निर्माता

BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

**SAYYID
AHMAD KHAN**

आधुनिक भारत के निर्माता

आधु

K.A.NIZAMI

तार:

नव-भारत के निर्माता


நவபாரதச் சிற்பிகள்

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Builders of Modern India

SAYYID AHMAD KHAN

K. A. NIZAMI



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ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people and giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times.

The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to different people. It has, therefore, not been possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series.

PREFACE

This biography of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, one of the architects of modern India, is based on a number of sources, particularly noteworthy among them being the letters of the Sayyid and the new material recently made available by the opening of an Archives Section in the Maulana Azad Library at the Aligarh Muslim University. A detailed bibliography of the sources is given in Appendix B.

I am grateful to Shri R.R. Diwakar, General Editor of the Builders of Modern India Series, for this kindness in going through the synopsis and making valuable suggestions and to Dr. Yusuf Husain Khan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University, for his kind help and guidance.

K. A. NIZAMI

Aligarh,
May 28, 1965

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

In the history of India's transition from medievalism to modernism, Sayyid Ahmad Khan stands out prominently as a dynamic force pitted against conservatism, superstition, inertia and ignorance. He contributed many of the essential elements to the development of modern India and paved the way for the growth of a healthy scientific attitude of mind which is a *sine qua non* for advancement, both material and intellectual.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was born in 1817 and breathed his last in 1898. These 81 years were a most momentous period in India's history, a period characterized by transition in almost every sphere of life, political, social and economic. The Mughal empire passed away yielding place to British imperialism; the old social order, a legacy of centuries of Mughal rule, succumbed to the pressure of new social forces. The medieval economic structure collapsed under the impact of industrialisation based on Western science and technology. To live in such a period of transition and rapid change could hardly have been a happy experience for one born and brought up in the old order. Constantly and mercilessly, tradition pulled him in one direction and modern development in the opposite one; but his sensitive soul perceived the portents of change and took up the challenge. He plunged headlong in the struggle and accelerated the process of transition.

When Sayyid Ahmad Khan was born, clouds were gathering thick and fast over the political horizon of India.

Fourteen years before his birth, the forces of Lord Lake had triumphantly entered Delhi and a chapter of India's political history had come to a close. The Mughal empire was reduced to a phantom of its former glory. The pomp and pageantry of the court, its etiquette, its ceremonials, its daily routine, its titles, its firmans and its robes of honour continued as before, but the authority of the emperor had vanished. He had become not merely a pensioner but a prisoner in the hands of the East India Company. For every increase in his subsistence allowance, he had to make abject appeals to the British Resident.

The Red Fort, once the Versailles of India, now presented a gloomy picture of degeneration and decay. "The Shah Burj was dirty, lonely and wretched, the baths and fountains dry: the inlaid pavement hid with lumber and gardener's sweepings, and the walls stained with the dung of birds and bats."¹ Even a casual visitor could see that the centre of political gravity had shifted elsewhere. The presence of a very large number of parasites inside the palace added further to the general economic depression in the court. It was well-nigh impossible for the emperor to provide for the needs of all his collaterals, whose number in 1848 exceeded two thousand.² Cunningham describes their condition thus in an official paper:

"The *salatin* quarter consists of an immense high wall so that nothing can overlook it. Within this are numerous mat huts in which these wretched objects live. When the gates were opened there was a rush of miserable, half-naked, starved beings who surrounded us."³

¹ Heber, Narrative of, *a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, pp. 306-307.

² Spear, *Twilight of the Mughals*, p. 62.

³ As quoted by Spear, *ibid.* p. 62.

Many of these princes, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, used to cry from their house-tops: "We are dying of hunger. We are dying of hunger." But, because of a false sense of pride, they would not come out of the fort and earn their livelihood. The process of decay, which had started in the beginning of the 18th century, now reached its climax. Even the powers which had shaken the central Mughal authority, namely the Marathas, the Jats and the Sikhs, quickly went down before the rising tide of British imperialism. Lord Hastings (1813-1823) fought wars against the Gurkhas, the Pindaris and the Marathas and forced almost every Indian power to recognize the paramountcy of the British. Then followed a period of relentless measures to consolidate the British power in India. Mysore, Coorg and Sind were annexed. The Sikh power was broken and in 1843, the Punjab was annexed. Applying his Doctrine of Lapse, Dalhousie annexed a number of States and practically the entire country came under the rule of the British. The Mughals had not merely founded an empire: they had also helped in the evolution of a culture which was all-embracing and cosmopolitan in its essential characteristics. Sayyid Ahmad was not only a product but a typical representative of this culture. He was born and brought up in Delhi which had been, for many centuries, the heart of the empire and, as such, "the last refuge of a traditional culture".⁴

It was a city of light and shade, and Sayyid Ahmad had had an opportunity to see its rosy as well as its seamy side. He used to visit the court with his father and thus he had first-hand knowledge of the court life of the Mughals. He had heard the inspiring sermons of Shah Ismail Shahid, and had breathed in the spiritual atmosphere of Shah Ghulam Ali's *Khanqah* which attracted ardent devotees from distant parts of the Muslim world. He had come into contact with the leaders of the Rasul Shahis as well as the Wahhabis. He

⁴ Spear, *ibid*, p. 83.

sat at the feet of the descendants of Shah Waliullah, and received instructions in religious sciences from Maulana Makhsusullah and Maulana Rashiduddin Khan. He studied mathematics from his talented uncle, Khwaja Zainuddin. He was thus closely connected with the highest spiritual and literary traditions of the Indian Muslims during the 19th century. Apart from this, he had seen and, to some extent, enjoyed the lighter side of Delhi's social life. He had attended music parties at the houses of the nautch-girls and musicians of Delhi. He had enjoyed and participated in popular games like swimming, archery, kite flying, etc. Though Delhi was undergoing a rapid process of political decay and degeneration at this time, its cultural life was full of charm and attraction. It was the Delhi of Ghalib, of Shah Ghulam Ali, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, Sahbai and Momin from where Sayyid Ahmad's personality received its hue and lustre.

But this cultural efflorescence of the pre-1857 Delhi had about it an unhealthy look on account of the terrible economic crisis which faced the country. The fall of the Mughal empire resulted in the ruin of an important section of the society. Around the Mughal emperor had developed a class of people which, both socially and economically, derived its sustenance from the empire. With its fall this class was thrown out of its position of social and economic security. The problem of its adjustment, both emotional and economic, with the changed circumstances was as difficult as it was urgent. This class had refused to move with the times and clung to the Mughal court when it was, for all practical purposes, completely bankrupt. Sayyid Ahmad Khan saw with his own eyes the descendants of Muhammad bin Tughluq cultivating land in villages near Tughlaqabad and met a great grandson of Nawab Khalilullah Khan, an eminent noble of Shah Jahan, who earned his livelihood by performing menial service to the people. Foreign trading companies—Portuguese, Dutch, French and English—

backed by the Industrial Revolution of Europe, began to jostle in India in search of markets for their products. When Clive secured the *diwani* of Bengal, the life-line of the Mughal empire was cut off. It was Bengal which had financed the Mughal empire in the days of its crisis. The British merchants employed all methods to kill the indigenous industries and to check the export of Indian goods to Europe. Flourishing centres of Indian industries such as Surat, Dacca, Murshidabad, were reduced to a position of complete economic destitution. The invention of the power-loom killed the hand-loom industries, while the fall of the landed aristocracy reduced the Indian craftsmen to a position of utter penury. Sayyid Ahmad Khan observed:

"The speed with which decline has set in is so rapid that it seems imminent that within a few years the Muslims will not be found anywhere excepting serving in stables and kitchens or mowing the grass."⁵

When he spoke in this vein, he was not exaggerating because he had seen with his own eyes descendants of old and respectable families reduced to a state of abject poverty. He had also witnessed the acute distress of the people during the famines.

Following the Revolt of 1857, the hand of the British fell heavily upon the Muslims, because, as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru remarks, "they were considered more aggressive and militant, possessing memories of recent rule in India, and therefore more dangerous".⁶ In Delhi alone thousands were massacred and gibbeted on the streets. Big and prosperous localities were completely effaced on the slightest suspicion of anti-British activity. The entire Khanam Bazar, near the Red Fort, where stately buildings once raised their heads,

⁵ *Lectures*, p. 244.

⁶ *An Autobiography*, p. 460.

was turned into mounds of debris. These atrocities struck awe and terror into the hearts of the people and demoralized them completely. This tragedy, which Sayyid Ahmad Khan saw with his own eyes, affected him profoundly. His hair turned grey and in moments of melancholic despondency he even thought of leaving the country and settling elsewhere. The end of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid's movement, which had resulted in the annihilation of thousands of Mussalmans at the battle-field of Balakot, became fresh in his memory. The movement of 1857 had likewise ended in a complete fiasco for the Mussalmans. He realized with the clear and unerring vision of a realist that nothing could resuscitate Muslim political power. As soon as he got over his pessimism, he began to brood over the question: Why this collapse and what next? He found that the cause lay in illiteracy and the cure is education, and dedicated all his time and energy to the popularisation of modern education amongst the Indian people, particularly the Muslims.

The failure of the medieval Muslim educational system to meet the requirements of the times had become obvious as early as the middle of the 17th century. Even Aurangzeb had protested to his teacher about the futility of the subjects taught to him. The attempts made by scholars like Maulana Nizamuddin Sihalvi to reorganise the Muslim educational system were within the traditional medieval framework and could hardly meet the needs of the time. Some Indian nobles like Danishmand Khan, were drawn to a study of Western science and arts but their individual efforts could not crystallize into any movement for the popularization of Western science and technology. Had the anxiety of the Indian mind to keep abreast of Western learning in various spheres of science and art, as evinced in the attitude and behaviour of Danishmand Khan, not vanished so quickly as it actually did, the transition from the medieval to the modern would have taken place in India much earlier. But as things stood, when Sayyid Ahmad Khan started his

movement for the intellectual and social uplift of the people, he found the traditional system of Muslim education a great stumbling block in the way of progress. There was reluctance to accept Western science and technology which had completely altered the pattern of society.

Explaining the utter futility of the medieval methods of education and research, he said that in the earlier days a scholar could expound and refute theories sitting in his lonely cell, but in the 19th century the development of experimental and inductive methods had made that position absolutely untenable. A study of the new sciences was necessary even to preserve the legacy of medieval learning. It was his firm conviction that the Indians could never get a place in the civilized world unless they acquired Western knowledge and developed their country on the lines of Europe. To him education was not merely instruction in a few text-books prescribed for certain courses but an all-out effort to extricate people from the meshes of medievalism, obscurantism and superstition. Further, he repeatedly said that the Indians could obtain their political rights through Western education alone. These statements, when read with the fears expressed by Lord Ellenborough that the popularization of Western education in India would make British domination in the country impossible,⁷ leave no

⁷ The general impression that anyone who stood up to popularise Western education would have received British help and sympathy is completely wrong. Missionary schools apart, where the purpose was to win converts, the British Government did not want to encourage education of the Western type beyond a point. As early as 1792, when Wilberforce proposed to add two clauses to the Charter Act of that year for sending out school masters to India, one of the Directors remarked: "We had just lost America from our folly in having allowed the establishment of schools and colleges, and that it would not do for us to repeat the same act of folly in regard to India." (J. C. Marshman's Evidence, Lord's Second Report, 1853). The disinclination of the British to spread education continued for years. When private enterprise started English education in Bengal, they disliked it. Lord Ellenborough said:

doubt that the Sayyid's views on education were realistic and far-sighted. The reluctance of the Muslims to move with the times was comparatively greater than that of the Hindus. The Hindu reformers—Raja Ram Mohan Roy, D. N. Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen and others— had fought against the Hindu attitude towards Western knowledge and had to a very large extent, softened the rigidity of the Hindu mind in that matter. In Bengal, Madras and Bombay there were several movements for the popularization of Western knowledge and learning amongst the Hindus. The Muslims had not moved from their position; in fact, no Muslim reformer had so far appeared on the scene to fight against their medieval concepts and values. It was Sayyid Ahmad Khan who first entered this field. Addressing a condolence meeting on his death, Professor T. H. Arnold remarked: "Sir Sayyid called upon his people to rouse themselves out of the lethargy, the sloth, the ignorance, the degradation into which they had fallen, and behold! a new generation has arisen in response to his call."⁸ What was this call and how a new generation rose up in response to it, may be read in the pages that follow. Sayyid Ahmad Khan worked for the betterment and welfare of all Indian people and not merely the Muslims. Addressing a meeting of the Indian Association of Lahore in 1884, he thus explained the spirit and the inspiring motive of his life:

"My friends! You have alluded to the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in your address. I would be sorry if any one were to think that this college was founded to mark a distinction between the

"If these gentlemen who wished to educate the natives of India were to succeed to the utmost extent of their desire, we should not remain in the country for three months." (Lord Ellenborough's Evidence, Commons' Report of 1852, as cited by R. Dutt in *The Economic History of India*, p. 152).

⁸ The M.A.O. College Magazine, April 1898, p. 126.

Hindus and Mahomedans. The chief cause that led to the foundation of this college was, as I believe you are aware of, that the Mahomedans were becoming more and more degraded and poor every day. Their religious prejudices had kept them back from taking advantage of the education offered by the Government colleges and schools; and consequently it was deemed necessary that some special arrangement should be made for them. It can be thus illustrated: suppose there are two brothers, one of whom is quite vigorous and healthy, while the other is ill and is decaying; then it will be the duty of the former to help him towards his recovery. This was the thought which led me to the foundation of the Mahomedan Anglo-Oriental College. But I am happy to be able to say that both brothers receive the same instruction in that college. All the rights at the college which belong to one who calls himself a Mahomedan, belong without any restriction to him also who calls himself a Hindu. There is not the least distinction between the Hindus and the Mahomedans. Only he can claim the reward who earns it by his own exertions. Both Hindus and Mahomedans are equally entitled to scholarships at the college, both are treated equally as boarders. I regard the Hindus and Mahomedans as my two eyes."⁹

His activities throughout his long life bear out this statement.

⁹ Sayyid Ahmad Khan Ka Safar Namah-i Punjab, pp. 159-160.

CHAPTER II

ANCESTRY, BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Sayyid Ahmad Khan belonged to a very distinguished and respectable family of Delhi which traced its genealogy to Imam Husain, grandson of the Prophet. Its members served at the imperial court and owed spiritual allegiance to the two most respected religious leaders of the age: Shah Ghulam Ali¹ and Shah Abdul Aziz.² Political influence and religious prestige had thus combined to give this family a pre-eminent place in the social circles of Delhi.

Sayyid Ahmad's ancestors originally belonged to Harat. They migrated to India during the reign of Akbar³ (1556-

¹ Shah Abdullah, popularly known as Shah Ghulam Ali (1743—1824), was a distinguished saint of the Naqshbandi order of Muslim mystics. He had hundreds of thousands of disciples and his hospice at Delhi was thronged by persons from distant parts of the Muslim world as well as from China and Abyssinia. His conversations were recorded by a disciple, Shah Rauf Ahmad, under the title *Durr-ul-Ma'arif* (Nadiri Press, Bareilly, 1886). For a brief biographical notice, see *Asar-us-Sanadid*, Chapter IV.

² Shah Abdul Aziz (1746—1823) was the eldest son of the famous scholar Shah Waliullah of Delhi. For about 60 years, he lectured in his famous seminary Madrasa-i-Rahimiya where students and scholars came from far and near. He is the author of several works, the most well known being *Tuhfa-i-Asna-i-Ash'ariya*, some chapters of which were translated into Urdu by Sayyid Ahmad Khan. For a brief biographical account, see *Asar-us-Sanadid*, Chapter IV.

³ Hali says that his ancestors came to India during the reign of Shah Jahan (*Hayat-i-Jaweed*, Vol. I, p. 16), but Sayyid Ahmad himself writes in *Loyal Mahomedans of India* (Part I, p. 11) that it was during the time

1605) and joined the Mughal service. For nearly two centuries and a half, till almost the extinction of Mughal power in India, this family loyally served the Mughal emperors and maintained close links with the court. One of the early members of this family, Sayyid Muhammad Dost, received the title of *Yakka Bahadur* from Aurangzeb on account of his heroic exploits on the battlefield. His great grandson, Sayyid Hadi, was the grandfather of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Sayyid Hadi received in 1754 the title of *Jawwad Ali Khan* and a *mansab* of one thousand *zat* and 500 *sawar*⁴ from the Mughal emperor Alamgir II. Later on Shah Alam conferred upon him the title of *Jawwad-ud-daula* and entrusted to him the office of *Ihtisab*⁵ as well as the *Karori*⁶ of the *subah* of Shahjahanabad. In 1774, the office of the *Qazi-i-Lashkar* (*Qazi* of the army) was also assigned to him. Besides being an officer of exceptional ability, Sayyid Hadi was a man of letters also. Sayyid Ahmad Khan possessed an autographed copy of his *diwan* (collection of poems), but it was lost during the disturbances of 1857. Sayyid Hadi's son, Sayyid Mutaqqi, was the father of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. All the titles and honours which Mutaqqi's father had enjoyed at

of Akbar that his forefathers reached this country.

⁴ The Mughal army officers were holders of ranks known as *mansabs*. A *mansabdar's* pay was determined first by his normal rank, i.e., the number of his *zat* (basic) troops; next, by the number of horsemen (*sawar*) which he was allowed to keep as a mark of distinction. For details, see J. N. Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, pp. 201—203.

⁵ The person in charge of the office of *Ihtisab* (i.e., *muhtasib*) was a type of censor of public morals. His duties included, besides other things, keeping an eye on the sale of intoxicating drinks and the activities of professional women. For details, see J. N. Sarkar, *ibid*, pp. 25-26.

⁶ The actual revenue collector was called *Karori* during the Mughal period. He was so styled because he was placed in charge of a tract expected to yield a revenue of one *Kror*. Akbar had introduced this arrangement but the title of *Karori* was continued in later times irrespective of the amount of revenue to be collected by this officer. During the later days it meant simply a "Collector of state dues".

the Mughal court were conferred on him also. But these titles now carried little or no financial rewards or emoluments as the Mughal government was, to all intents and purposes, a bankrupt government. Sayyid Mutaqqi was at first hesitant in accepting these titles but on account of his personal regard for Akbar Shah, whom he had known since his childhood, he could not decline them. He was on such close terms with the emperor that he had free access to the *Khwabgah*,⁷ and had the permission to sit in the durbar, while all other eminent nobles and *mansabdars* kept standing. The emperor used to address him as 'Bhai Mutaqqi'.

Sayyid Mutaqqi represented in many ways the culture of his day. An adept in the art of archery and swimming, he was a brave, loyal and truthful officer of the Mughal court. Notwithstanding all this, he had a mystic temperament and was attracted by mystics and recluses. He was one of those few persons who successfully maintained their dignity and self-respect at the Mughal court which was surrounded by wheedlers and flatterers on all sides. Mirza Shamsuddin, who had opposed Akbar Shah's claim to the throne, was *persona non grata* with the emperor. But Sayyid Mutaqqi had very good relations with him also and used to visit him off and on.

The Mirza also displayed great affection and regard for him. This intimacy and contact offended Akbar Shah who could not help asking Sayyid Mutaqqi not to visit the Mirza. "Has your Majesty any doubt about the fidelity of this humble servant?" submitted Sayyid Mutaqqi with folded hands but great self-confidence. Akbar Shah smiled and said: "No, no." "Then", submitted Sayyid Mutaqqi, "why should I give up my old practice and unnecessarily disgrace myself." This consistency, steadfastness and self-confidence

⁷ A private apartment of the palace near the Musamin Burj.

considerably enhanced Sayyid Mutaqqi's prestige and influence at the Mughal court.

Sayyid Mutaqqi owed spiritual allegiance to Shah Ghulam Ali, one of the most outstanding Muslim saints and divines of India, whose *Khanqah* attracted people from distant parts of the Muslim world. The saint had great affection for him and treated him as hisson. "I have no family", he used to say, "but God has instilled the same love in my heart for the family of Sayyid Mutaqqi which one has for his own sons and daughters." Every day the saint's servant came to his house to enquire about the welfare of his family. Sayyid Mutaqqi himself was deeply attached to his spiritual mentor. When, in his last moments. Shah Ghulam Ali asked his disciples to keep a grave ready for him, Sayyid Mutaqqi humbly begged of him to choose a piece of land for his grave near his own. Sayyid Mutaqqi died on Rajab 15, 1254 (1838 A.D.) and was buried by the side of his spiritual master.

Sayyid Ahmad's maternal grandfather, Khwaja Fariduddin Ahmad (1747-1828).⁸ was a man of exceptional abilities. Khwaja Fariduddin's grandfather Khwaja Abdul Aziz, who traded in Kashmiri shawls, had settled in Delhi. Of his eight grandsons, Khwaja Fariduddin and Khwaja Najibuddin attained great fame and popularity in Delhi. Khwaja Najibuddin, later known as Shah Fida Husain, joined the Rasul Shahi⁹ order of mystics and got his head, beard, eyebrows and moustaches shaved. Following the Rasul Shahi tradition, he put on a loin cloth, smeared his body with dust and led a life of religious devotion and contemplation. He had mastery over the works of Ibn-i-

⁸ Sayyid Ahmad wrote a short biography of his maternal grandfather under the title *Sirat-i-Faridiya* (printed at the Mufid-i-Am Press, Agra, 1896).

⁹ Rasul Shahi order was an off-shoot of the Sulirawardi *silsilah*. It is so styled after Rasul Shah.

Arabi, the famous Spanish mystic who is known for his systematic exposition of the pantheistic philosophy. He hated the company of rich men. Once Akbar Shah sought an interview with him but he refused to see him. He was an eloquent conversationalist and whoever came close to him felt enamoured of him. Shah Fida Husain died in 1843 at Alwar and was buried there in Chambayli Bagh, the graveyard of Rasul Shahis. Khwaja Fariduddin was an erudite scholar, well-versed in many sciences of the day, particularly mathematics. He had prepared with great ingenuity and skill some mathematical instruments and had written a number of brochures on the subject. The circle of his pupils was very large and included men like Maulvi Karamat Ali, Maulvi Rajab Ali, Khwaja Muhammad Nasir Jan and Hakim Rustam Ali Khan. Sayyid Ahmad Khan used to say that owing to the eminence achieved by Khwaja Fariduddin in that subject, mathematics had become his 'family science'. Khwaja Fariduddin had a well-stocked library and Sayyid Ahmad Khan used to consult books from this collection. Besides his attainments in the academic field, he was known for his administrative abilities, persuasive powers and a very strong common sense which helped him in diplomatic negotiations. He was appointed Superintendent of Calcutta Madrasa on a salary of Rs. 700 per month. In 1803, Lord Wellesley decided to send him on a diplomatic mission to Iran.¹⁰

The relations of the British with Fath Ali Shah Qachar had reached a critical stage. Iran interpreted the death of her ambassador at Bombay. Haji Muhammad Khalil Khan, as a deliberate act of murder. Wellesley sent Fariduddin to Iran and charged him with the mission of improving relations with that country. Khwaja Fariduddin succeeded in this

¹⁰ Graham (*The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, p. 2) gives 1799 as the date of this embassy, but Sayyid Ahniad Khan himself considers 1803 as the probable date (*Sirat-i-Faridiya*, p. 15).

delicate mission and persuaded Fath Ali Khan to send Muhammad Nabi Khan as his envoy to India. His success in Persia enhanced his reputation as a diplomat and he was subsequently sent to the court of Ava (Burma) to settle a dispute. Here also he completed his task with ability and success.

On his return from Burma, Khwaja Fariduddin was entrusted with the realization of revenues in the region of Bundelkhand. This area was conquered by the British in 1803 and was presenting some difficulties in the collection of revenues. Khwaja Fariduddin was appointed Tehsildar of Banda. Instead of a fixed salary, he was to get 10 per cent of the revenue collections. In 1810, he resigned this job and returned to Delhi. During his absence from Delhi for about twelve or thirteen years, great changes had taken place in the political set-up of the imperial city. It had been captured by Lord Lake in September 1803 and General Ochterlony was in charge of its administration. Khwaja Fariduddin probably did not find the atmosphere congenial to him and left for Calcutta.

Financial difficulties forced Akbar Shah II to look for a capable wazir to tide over the deepening economic crisis. He asked Sayyid Mutaqqi to take over charge of the financial affairs but he suggested the name of his father-in-law, Khwaja Fariduddin. In 1815, Akbar Shah II called the Khwaja from Calcutta and appointed him as his wazir. He also conferred upon him the title of *Dabir-ud-Daula Amin-ul-Mulk Muslah Jung*. The Mughal government was then on the brink of financial collapse. Khwaja Fariduddin first turned his attention to financial matters and strove hard to balance the budget. He reduced the pensions and salaries of the princes, and curtailed expenses on the ladies of the *harem* and the servants of the royal household. Some of the superfluous *karkhanas* were also closed. The roof of the Diwan-i-Am, which was made of gold, was sold in the market while the copper was used for minting coins.

Through these measures he paid off a considerable amount of the debts and brought about a balance between income and expenditure. But these measures provoked opposition and people began to say that while Nadir Shah had looted the silver ceiling of Diwan-i-Khas, Khwaja Farid plundered the copper ceiling of Diwan-i-Am. Under these circumstances Khwaja Farid thought it proper to resign and to retire to Calcutta. But soon afterwards he was recalled from Calcutta and was again put in charge of the financial affairs of the empire. He served for about three years and then resigned at the instance of General Ochterlony, the British Resident at Delhi, who had now become his personal friend. He was then invited to Lahore by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, but he declined the invitation as he did not want to leave Delhi in his old age.

Despite his political career, Khwaja Fariduddin was a man of strong mystic leanings. He was a disciple of Makka Shah, a Rasul Shahi saint. He was a large-hearted and affectionate person. When he distributed his property before his death, he treated his old servant and *diwan*, Lala Maluk Chand as one of the members of his family and gave him the share of a brother. He breathed his last in 1828. It was his daughter who gave birth to Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

One of the sons of Khwaja Fariduddin, Khwaja Zainuddin Ahmad, the maternal uncle of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, was like his father a man of great talent and varied interests. He exercised profound influence on the life and thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He was an expert in music, mathematics, kite-flying, shooting, making of bows, etc. He could make all the geometrical instruments and those required in astronomical calculations. He also wrote a *risalah* on the making of kites. It was in this family of repute that Sayyid Ahmad Khan was born on October 17, 1817 at

Delhi.¹¹ He was a very healthy and robust child. When Khwaja Fariduddin saw the newly-born babe, he remarked: "A Jat is born in our family!" Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not a precocious child and except for good health he had nothing extraordinary about him. Whatever he achieved later was by dint of personal effort.

Sayyid Mutaqqi requested his spiritual master, Shah Ghulam Ali, to give a name to the child. The saint suggested the name Ahmad; earlier he had given the name Muhammad to his elder brother. When Sayyid Ahmad attained the age of four years and four months, the traditional ceremony of *Bismillah*, which is a sort of announcement that the child has formally started receiving education, was performed. In his later years, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was always proud of the fact that a saint of Shah Ghulam Ali's piety and eminence had performed that ceremony. He even composed a Persian verse to commemorate the event. Association with the great Naqshbandi saint of Delhi was a proud privilege of this family and Sayyid Ahmad Khan's father tried to infuse the same attitude of respect in his son. On the eve of every *urs* (death anniversary) of his spiritual master, Shah Ghulam Ali used to place a coin on the grave of the saint as a token of reverence and *nazar*. This coin was always picked up by Sayyid Mutaqqi and kept as a token of blessing and benediction. Once it so happened that some other disciple of Shah Ghulam Ali obtained the saint's permission to remove that coin. Sayyid Mutaqqi was, as usual, present there and his son Sayyid Ahmad, then a boy of very tender age, stood by his side. When the saint placed the coin on the grave, Sayyid Mutaqqi at once rose up and submitted to his master: "Your Reverence! While I and my children are here, why have you decided to give this coin to others!" "No, none

¹¹ He had one elder sister Safyat-un-Nisa Begum who died in 1892 at the age of 90, and one elder brother Sayyid Muhammad Khan who died in 1845.

except you would have this coin," replied the saint, and Sayyid Mutaqqi immediately beckoned to Sayyid Ahmad to pick up the coin. This incident impressed on the child's mind an attitude of profound reverence towards Shah Ghulam Ali and, to the very end of his life, whenever Sayyid Ahmad happened to be in Delhi, he never missed visiting two places—the Jama Masjid of Delhi and the grave of Shah Ghulam Ali.

In his early years Sayyid Ahmad was looked after by a nurse named Man Bibi who loved him immensely. The child was also very much attached to her. Sayyid Ahmad was five years old when Man Bibi died. A few hours before her death she had given fruit juice to the child. Her sudden death came as a severe shock to Sayyid Ahmad who repeatedly questioned his mother about Man Bibi's whereabouts. "She is living in a very good house. Many servants are in her attendance and she is passing her days in great comfort. You need not worry about her," his mother would reply. In her last moments, Man Bibi had expressed the wish that all her ornaments be given to Sayyid Ahmad. Sayyid Ahmad's mother, however, wanted to give all her belongings in charity. One day she asked Sayyid Ahmad: "If you approve of it, I will send these ornaments to Man Bibi." Sayyid Ahmad readily agreed. Sayyid Ahmad spent his early youth in the aristocratic atmosphere of the house of his maternal grandfather, Khwaja Fariduddin. There were more than a dozen boys of his age-group in the family and all of them lived and played together. Though no undue restraints were placed on their youthful activities, contact with outsiders was discouraged. Sayyid Ahmad Khan used to say that he was never permitted to go out without an attendant.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan had very lively and pleasant memories of his stay at the house of his maternal grandfather. In fact, his mother's family played a great part in moulding his thought and personality. Khwaja Fariduddin died in 1828 when Sayyid Ahmad Khan was only a boy of

11 years, but the grand old man of the family had already contributed his share to the building up of the character and habits of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Recalling in his old age the incidents of his early life, he said:

"My maternal grandfather used to take his lunch in the female apartment. A large *dastar-khawan* was spread out and all his sons, daughters, grandsons, grand-daughters and wives of sons joined the lunch. Empty dishes were placed before the children. My grandfather used to ask every child: "What dish would you like to have?" Whatever the child indicated, he himself put with a spoon in his plate. The children partook of their food with great decorum. Everyone took care that nothing dropped on the carpet and that his hands were not soiled and that no chewing sound was produced. He used to take his dinner in the male apartment. It was temporarily converted into *Zenana* and my mother and my aunt came out to serve dinner to him. All the boys used to sit there. We were particularly careful about the cleanliness of our feet because if anybody's feet left some mark on the *chandni*, he was reprimanded. If any child had ink spots on his clothes, he was displeased with him also. In the evening, when it was time for lighting the candles, all his grandchildren who read in the *maktabs*, and of whom I was one, went to him to read out their lessons. Whoever had studied his lesson well, was given some good sweets; whoever did not remember his lesson well was admonished"¹²

Once Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrongly translated a Persian couplet. The Khwaja asked him thrice but he could not give the correct version. "Thou art *bay-pira*",¹³ he said in great

¹² *Hayat-i-Jaweed*, Vol. I, p. 37.

¹³ Sayyid Ahmad Khan said that when his maternal grandfather was annoyed with anybody he would say: "Thou art *bay-pira*"— a very

anger. A few anecdotes relating to Sayyid Ahmad's early life show his intelligent curiosity and truthfulness at that tender age. He was five or six years of age. One day, as he came out from the female apartment and was proceeding to his grandfather's drawing room he saw General Ochterlony talking to his grandfather. As he was turning back, his grandfather called him and asked him to talk to the General. Sayyid Ahmad asked him questions like: "Why do you wear feathers in your hat? And why do you have so many buttons on your coat?" Ochterlony was very much amused at the boy's curiosity. An incident which shows his truthfulness relates to the Mughal court. Sayyid Mutaqqi used to visit the court very frequently. Often Sayyid Ahmad would go with him and receive robes of honour from the emperor. One morning he overslept. On waking up he hurried to the palace, but found that the emperor had risen from the throne and had entered the *palki*. Sayyid Ahmad's name, as was the custom, was called out by the chamberlain. After proceeding a short distance, the emperor stopped in the *tasbih-khana* and sent for Sayyid Ahmad, took him by the hand and asked him why he was late. Sayyid Ahmad replied that he had overslept. The courtiers were aghast at his daring to tell the truth. But the emperor smiled and said: "You should get up early."

It was at the court of Akbar Shah II that Sayyid Ahmad had opportunities of seeing the great Indian reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy. It is significant that at that tender age the impression that he formed of the Raja was one of ability, scholarship, seriousness, culture and urbanity. The most powerful single factor in shaping the character of Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the influence of his mother, Aziz un Nisa Begum, a lady of exceptional ability, philanthropic sentiments and fervent piety. Asked about his early years,

significant word which throws light on medieval outlook. *Bay-pira* means one who has no *pir* and there was no greater misfortune for a man than to be without a spiritual mentor.

Sayyid Ahmad said that the following Persian verse epitomized his life:

Tifii o Damane Madar Khush Bahishte Buda Ast

Chun Bapae Khud Rowan Gashtaim Sargardan Shudaim
 Childhood and the lap of mother were like paradise for us:
 (When we started walking on our own feet, we strayed.)

In fact it was she who imbued Sayyid Ahmad's mind with both lofty ideals and grim realism. She taught him parts of the *Qur'an* and some elementary books. She was very strict in matters of discipline and decency and often rebuked and admonished her son. Some of the incidents which Sayyid Ahmad Khan related in his later life reveal the extent to which his character and thought had been influenced by his mother.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan, then 11 or 12 years of age, slapped an old and aged servant. When his mother came to know of it, she turned him out of the house saying: "This boy does not deserve to live in this house." A maid servant was directed to take him out and leave him on the road. Sayyid Ahmad's aunt, who lived in the neighbourhood, gave him protection but all the time she was afraid that if her sister came to know of it she would resent it. After three days she took him to his mother who refused to forgive him unless he apologized to the servant. It was only when Sayyid Ahmad apologized that he was admitted again into the house.

Two incidents which reveal her hatred of superstitions and a strong commonsense were often mentioned by Sayyid Ahmad Khan as having exercised deep influence on his life. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's elder brother died at a time when preparations had nearly been completed in a relation's family for the marriage of a girl. The parents of the girl wanted to postpone the marriage, but Sayyid Ahmad's mother considered this postponement as an unnecessary financial loss to the family. She went to the girl's parents and insisted

on the marriage ceremony being performed according to schedule. "When I have no objection to it, who else can object to it," she said.

When Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a *Munsif* at Delhi, he always used to go out in a carriage. His mother advised him: "Wherever you have to go regularly, sometimes go on foot and sometimes in a carriage. Who knows, tomorrow you may not be in a position to afford a carriage! Cultivate habits which you can continue even in adverse circumstances." Throughout his life Sayyid Ahmad acted upon this advice of his mother.

Sayyid Ahmad's mother was a philanthropist and her son was deeply influenced by her. She used to set aside five per cent of the income for charitable purposes. With this money she would help widows, arrange marriages of orphan girls, and finance many other philanthropic works. Once when she was convalescing after a serious illness, an expensive tonic was prepared for her. However, she realized that her maid servant, who had also been ill needed it more than she did and since she could not afford it, she gave the whole of it to her.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan inherited from his mother her generosity, large-heartedness and forbearance. When he was *Sadr Amin*, he went out of his way to help a person who was in some trouble and saved him. Sometime later, the ungrateful person started a campaign of smear and vilification against him and sent anonymous complaints against him to his officers. Sayyid Ahmad came to possess the evidence of that person's complicity in the slander campaign. Incidentally, his officer also happened to be ill-disposed towards that person. Sayyid Ahmad thought of wreaking vengeance on him by reporting the matter to the higher authorities. But when his mother came to know of this, she advised him: "The best thing for you to do is to forgive him. If at all you want to take revenge, entrust this

matter to that powerful Master who punishes people for their faults. To deliver your enemies to the weak officers of this world, is an act devoid of wisdom." This advice had a tremendous effect on him. Never again in his life did he think of avenging wrongs done to him. "Her advice has influenced me so deeply that I do not want that any body be punished on my account even on the Day of Judgement," Sayyid Ahmad Khan used to say in his old age, recalling the advice of his mother.

Sayyid Ahmad developed a variety of interests in the company of his maternal uncles and cousins. With Khwaja Zain ul Abidin he often went to the audition parties at the *Khanqah* of Khwaja Muhammad Nasir and also attended the musical performances of a well-known dancing girl of Delhi, Bi Habnan. He learnt shooting, kite flying and swimming. He also acquired a keen interest in mathematics and astrolabes.

Delhi and its cultural life had a charm of its own before 1857. Aristocratic families took part in out-door sports and pastimes like shooting and swimming. Sayyid Ahmad Khan learnt swimming from his father who was an expert in the art. There were two famous swimming teams in Delhi, one headed by Sayyid Mutaqqi, father of Sayyid Ahmad and the other by Maulvi Azim ullah. The two Mughal princes, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Tughal, belonged to the team lead by Maulvi Azim ullah. Both the groups, each a hundred strong, would assemble on the banks of the Yamuna. The swimmers would simultaneously jump into the river and race from Majnun Ka Teela to Shaikh Muhammad Ki Ba'in. When Sayyid Ahmad was learning swimming from his father the number of participants had decreased but even then there were 30 to 40 swimmers in Sayyid Mutaqqi's group.

Sayyid Mutaqqi was an expert shot also, and even Sayyid Ahmad's maternal uncle Nawab Zainuddin Khan had learnt the art from him. Sayyid Ahmad learnt shooting from his

father and his uncle Nawab Zainuddin Khan. Their sport gatherings were attended by the nobles like Nawab Azmatullah Khan, Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan and several Mughal princes. Sayyid Ahmad participated in these gatherings and once he surprised the gathering by his excellence in shooting.

Sayyid Ahmad's first teacher was his mother. Later, a female teacher taught him the holy *Qur'an*. The celebrations on the completion of his recitation of the *Qur'an* were "so strange and charming" that Sayyid Ahmad remembered them throughout his life. An eminent scholar, Maulana Hamiduddin, instructed him in elementary Persian works like *Karima*, *Khaliq Bari*, *Amad Nama*, etc. After Maulana Hamiduddin's death other teachers were employed to teach Sa'di's *Gulistan* and *Bustan* and some other books. After this, he started learning Arabic and read some elementary books rather indifferently. Then he turned his attention to mathematics and received instructions from his maternal uncle Nawab Zainuddin Khan. He had hardly completed the study of a few works on mathematics when he developed interest in astrolabes and acquired from his uncle the necessary knowledge about that subject. Later he turned to *tibb* and besides receiving theoretical instruction from Hakim Ghulam Hyder Khan, a noted *hakim* of Delhi, he practised under his supervision in his clinic for some months.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's formal education ended when he was 18 or 19 years old but his interest in books and in the company of scholars and *literati* continued unabated. He often visited Sahbai, Ghalib and Azurda who represented some of the finest traditions of medieval scholarship.

In his youth, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was greatly attracted by gay company, merry-making and enjoyments of life. He would attend music parties, enjoy convivial gatherings and participate in celebrations of festivals like Phul Walon Ki

Sair, Holi and Basant. When he was in service at Agra he had among his friends persons like Munshi Amir Alt Khan, Maulvi Ghulam Imam Shahid, Maulvi Ghulam Gilani and Maulvi Mohd. Shafi, who like him, were care-free, hilarious and interested in merry-making. Very often these convivial parties would be held at the Taj, Itimad-ud-Daula and Nur Afshan.

However, a family bereavement brought about a complete change in his outlook towards life. His elder brother died in 1845. It was such a severe shock to him that he lost all zest for life. He got his head shaven, grew a big beard and gave up all contact with gay and pleasure-loving young men.

CHAPTER III

IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE

On the death of Sayyid Mutaqqi in 1838, the pensions received from the Mughal court were abruptly discontinued except for a small maintenance allowance for his widow. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who was now about 22 years of age, thought of service under the East India Company. His relatives opposed the idea of severing connections with the Mughal court but he ignored their views as they were based on an unreal and sentimental approach towards the hard facts of life. The Mughal emperor was finding it difficult even to make his both ends meet; he could not possibly maintain the families of his servants and grandees of the empire. In order to gain some idea of the procedure at the courts established by the British in India, Sayyid Ahmad Khan first worked as an apprentice under Maulvi Khalilullah Khan, the *Sadr Amin* of Delhi. Within a few months he picked up the work so thoroughly that he got an appointment as a *Sarishtadar* in the office of the *Sadr Amin*. After some time Sayyid Ahmad Khan applied for a post under Mr. (afterwards Sir) Robert Hamilton who had been transferred to Delhi as a judge. Hamilton offered him a job in the session's court but Sayyid Ahmad Khan declined it as he did not consider himself competent enough for that post. Later on, when Hamilton was transferred to Agra, he called Sayyid Ahmad Khan there and offered him the post of *Naib Munshi* in the office of the Commissioner. Sayyid Ahmad accepted this post in February 1839.

As the work of land settlement was going on in several districts of Agra at that time, the Commissioner's office had

to deal with large number of problems relating to land, irrigation, produce, taxes, etc. Sayyid Ahmad Khan applied himself whole-heartedly to this work and gained such an insight and proficiency in it that he was able to prepare a very useful manual for the guidance of the settlement staff. Apart from this work, which was connected with his profession, he prepared a chart of the rulers of India and published it as *Jam-i-Jum* in 1840. Later he prepared a summary of the Civil Code with a view to securing appointment to the office of *Munsif*. The Commissioner forwarded this summary to the Government and recommended his appointment as *Munsif*. The Government issued orders for his appointment to the first vacancy, but before he could get a chance, a qualifying test for appointment to this post was announced by the Government. Sayyid Ahmad Khan appeared in the examination and passed with credit. His elder brother, Sayyid Muhammad Khan, also appeared but he could pass only in the second attempt. Sayyid Ahmad Khan published his summary of the Civil Code under the joint authorship of his brother. It was named as *Intikhab-al-Akhwain*, and proved extremely useful for candidates preparing for the examination for *Munsifship*.

On December 24, 1841, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was appointed as *Munsif* at Mainpuri. But within two weeks he was transferred to Fatehpur Sikri and moved there on January 10, 1842. During his four years' stay at Fatehpur Sikri, he also found time for his literary pursuit. He wrote three *risalas* including such topics as a biography of the Prophet, a translation of two chapters of *Tuhfa-i-Asna-i-Ash'ariya* and a translation of Bu Ali's Persian brochure *Ma'yar-ul-Uqqul* dealing with *Jarr-i-Saqil*.

After his transfer to Fatehpur Sikri, Sayyid Ahmad Khan came to Delhi for a brief holiday. His reputation as a talented civil servant had already reached the Mughal court. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan suggested to the emperor that family titles be granted to Sayyid Ahmad. Bahadur Shah

conferred on him the family title of *Jawwad ud Daula* and added to it the title of *Arif Jung*. These titles were conferred upon Sayyid Ahmad Khan with all the usual ceremonies at the Mughal court.

On February 18, 1846, Sayyid Ahmad was transferred to Delhi at his own request. The death of his elder brother was a severe shock to his mother and Sayyid Ahmad wanted to be near her. From 1846 to 1854, i.e., till his permanent appointment as *Sadr Amin*, he remained in Delhi except for two short-term assignments in 1850 and 1853 as officiating *Sadr Amin* at Rohtak.

During his stay at Delhi, Sayyid Ahmad Khan spent most of his time in the study of traditional subjects like *fiqh* (Muslim jurisprudence), *Usul-i-fiqh* (Principles of Muslim jurisprudence), *hadis* (traditions of the Prophet) and the *Qur'an*. In fact it was during this time that he filled up the gaps in his study and acquired as thorough a knowledge of the religious sciences as the time at his disposal permitted. Among his teachers the names of Maulvi Nawazish Ali, Maulvi Faizul Hasan and Maulana Makhsusullah are particularly noteworthy. The last one belonged to the distinguished family of Shah Waliullah and was known for his knowledge of the traditions of the Prophet. He taught *Mishkat*, parts of *Tirmizi* and *Muslim* and the whole of the *Qur'an* to Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Muslim theologians who questioned Sayyid Ahmad Khan's competence to write a commentary on the *Qur'an* completely ignored the fact that he had been a student of *Madrasa-i-Rahimiya* and was a pupil of Shah Waliullah's talented descendants. If from the Mughal court he had inherited the traditions of Muslim statesmanship, he had imbibed from the house of Shah Waliullah the traditions of Muslim scholarship. It was a rare combination of Muslim talent in India.

So long as Sayyid Ahmad Khan was *Munsif* at Delhi, he used to give his entire salary of Rs. 100 p.m. to his mother.

She would give him five rupees for pocket expenses and spend the rest on the household. "Whatever clothes she got prepared for me, I gladly wore; and whatever food she gave to me, I gladly took," Sayyid Ahmad Khan used to say. He had, however, great financial difficulties at this time and, in order to get over them, he thought of increasing his income through journalism and authorship. His elder brother Sayyid Muhammad Khan used to bring out a journal *Sayyid-ul-Akhbar*. Sayyid Ahmad Khan tried to make it a paying proposition. He thought of compiling a book on the archaeology and the people of Delhi which could bring some money to him. Though he failed to revitalize *Sayyid-ul-Akhbar*, his efforts in the direction of preparing a book on archaeology were crowned with success. He produced *Asar-us-Sanadid* in 1847. This book was followed by several religious tracts.

During his stay at Delhi Sayyid Ahmad Khan was promoted to be a first class *Munsif*. His next promotion could be to the post of *Sadr Amin* but he did not want to leave Delhi. Edward Thomas, author of the *Chronicles of the Pathan Kings of Delhi*, however, prevailed upon him to accept an appointment as *Sadr Amin* at Bijnor. On January 13, 1855, he took charge of this office at Bijnor. While in Bijnor, Sayyid Ahmad compiled a history of that district. The compilation included enormous statistical details collected from the firmans of the Mughal rulers and the records of the *qanungos* and the *patwaris*. This was probably one of the earliest efforts in the direction of preparing gazetteers in India. The Collector of Bijnor was so much impressed with this work that he sent it to the Government, but unfortunately the manuscript was lost in the upheaval of 1857.¹ He also prepared a critical edition of

¹ In this work Sayyid Ahmad Khan had discussed some inconsistencies in the *Fasli* and the *Ammali* calendars. Government circulars issued in 1860 and 1861 seem to be inspired by Sayyid Ahmad Khan's suggestions.

Abul Fazl's *A'in-i-Akbari* during this period. During his stay at Bijnor, Sayyid Ahmad Khan took keen interest in the welfare of the people. He got some roads repaired. A bridge was also constructed in that area. His concern for the comfort and well-being of the people earned for him the love and esteem of the citizens of Bijnor.

The first phase of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's career in Government service was, no doubt, characterized by a keen sense of devotion to duty and literary activity, but it lacked purpose and direction. His thoughts were still wandering in the old grooves and the books that he wrote during this time adhered either to the traditional line of thought—e.g., in one of his *risalas* he upheld the theory that earth was stationary—or were concerned with hair-splitting religious controversies initiated by scholars inspired by the Wahhabi school of thought. It was the upheaval of 1857 which supplied to him what so far his personality seemed to have been longing for— a purpose.

Sayyid Ahmad had hardly been in Bijnor for two years and four months when the Revolt of 1857 broke out. Within a couple of days of its outbreak at Delhi, the news of the revolt reached Bijnor. About 20 Europeans, who happened to be in Bijnor at that time, found their lives in great danger. Sayyid Ahmad Khan came to their help and protected them at the risk of his own life. He guarded their houses and arranged for their safe dispatch to Roorkee. Referring to his chivalrous protection of defenceless European families, Sir John Strachey once remarked that "no man ever gave nobler proof of conspicuous courage" than Sayyid Ahmad Khan did.

Nawab Mahmud Khan of Bijnor was the leader of the anti-British movement in that region. One night the Nawab and his nephew sent for Sayyid Ahmad Khan and offered him a hereditary *jagir* provided he cooperated with them. Sayyid Ahmad Khan declined the offer. This annoyed the

Nawab and he forcibly occupied Sayyid Ahmad's house and plundered all his property. Under these circumstances, Sayyid Ahmad Khan thought of leaving Bijnor for Meerut but, in the meantime, the Chaudhari of Haldur attacked the forces of Nawab Mahmud Khan and defeated him. The Nawab fled to Najibabad. Sayyid Ahmad reported all these developments to Cracroft Wilson, Special Commissioner at Meerut, who directed him to take over charge of the administration of Bijnor and work on behalf of the British Government. With the help and co-operation of Rahmat Khan, the Deputy Collector and Mir Turab Ali, the Tehsildar, Sayyid Ahmad Khan successfully carried on the administration of Bijnor for over a month. But an incident made his position, untenable. The Chaudhari of Haldur, despite warnings to the contrary, attacked Nagina, killed some people and plundered the town. Naturally, people rallied round the Nawab who attacked Bijnor and defeated the Chaudhari. Sayyid Ahmad Khan left Bijnor and reached Haldur. In the dead of the night he and Rahmat Khan left Haldur on foot for Meerut but they were pursued by two thousand armed men near Pilani. A village headman, Bakhshi, saved them and they somehow managed to reach Chandpur. They were, however, surrounded by several thousand armed men who would have killed Sayyid Ahmad but for the timely intervention of Mir Sadiq Ali Khan, a *rais* of Chandpur. Passing through Machola, Sayyid Ahmad Khan reached Bachchraon from where he sent a detailed account of the situation to the British Government. He somehow managed to reach Meerut within a few days. All that he had with him on reaching Meerut was a tattered garment on his body and 6 paisas in his pocket. In *The Loyal Muhammadans of India*, he gives the following account of his activity during this period:

"In the early part of the year 1857, I held the office of *Sudder Ameen* at Bijnore, and when the first stunning news of the mutiny at Meerut arrived, I

disbelieved it entirely; but when at length all doubts on the subject were painfully dispelled, I at once made up my mind as to my own conduct, and firmly resolved to stand by the Government at all hazards ... In pursuance of this determination, I attached myself to the person of Mr. Alexander Shakespear (*sic*). Magistrate and Collector of Bijnore, and was beside that gentleman on every occasion of emergency that arose in that perilous time. In fact. I forsook my own dwelling place, and was ever present night and day, at Mr. Shakespear's residence, feeling myself impelled to do my utmost to guard the lives of the authorities, of the ladies and children; and I don't recollect that at any time either in the night or in the day I put off from my person the weapons with which I had armed myself.

It was certainly a crisis of no slight peril which we encountered on the 21st May, 1857, when the convicts broke from Jail, and the mutineers of the Regiment of Sappers and Miners from Roorkee, were reported to have reached Nuggeena, a town in the Bijnore District. It was deemed advisable to throw down into wells the Government treasure, and Mr. Shakespear proceeded personally to attack the gang of self-liberated convicts, accompanied only by myself and two other Mahomedan officials. But there arose besides, on two subsequent occasions, exigencies of so trying a nature as to nerve all our faculties to face the imminent danger, which seemed to threaten us with inevitable destruction; and be it remarked, that on both these critical occasions there were only Mahomedans who were ready to defend, and to die with Mr. Shakespear (*sic*). The first occasion was when the Company of the 29th Regiment No. I. suddenly made its appearance at Bijnore. It chanced that I was not just then in attendance on Mr. Shakespear. and when the tidings reached me that the mutinous troops had arrived and

surrounded that gentleman's house, I was struck with heart-sickening dismay, and gave up all for lost. Yet although oppressed with the apprehension that the worst had happened, and that the authorities had been assassinated, I nevertheless felt it to be my duty to be a participator in the fearful calamity; and accordingly, hastily arming myself, and committing my child to the care of a servant, with the injunction that he should convey him to some place of safety when assured that I had fallen, I at once repaired to Mr. Shakespear's house, resigned to meet my fate; but happily it was only to feel a corresponding elation of spirits to find that my fears were unfounded; and both Mr. Shakespear (*sic*) and I were fortunate enough to escape the threatened danger. The next occasion fraught with peril is now to be described.

It was on the 8th of June, when the alarming intelligence was received by me that the Rebels had made a plot to murder the European officials that night. I lost no time in communicating this blood-thirsty design to Mr. Shakespear (*sic*), and the agony I endured during that anxious and memorable night surpasses description. Suffice it to say, there were three resolute native officials who were prepared, at that awful juncture to perish with their European officers, and all three were Mahomedans. That man also who penetrated into the midst of the Rebels, and succeeded in diverting them from their purpose, and so afforded the gentlemen whose lives were in jeopardy, an opportunity for making good their escape from the perils wherewith they were environed, was also a Mahomedan. It is then on account of such inestimable services as these, that I consider myself fully justified in boldly stating that the Mahomedans have proved themselves to be truly loyal subjects of the British Government!

While the Rebellion was rampant at Bijnore, I received unexpectedly, a commission to endeavour to re-assert the supremacy of the Government, and albeit I had no hope of saving my life from the hands of the Rebels, I nevertheless addressed myself to this difficult task with all alacrity, and caused a Proclamation to be issued in the name of the British Government, for the purpose of reassuring the people; and did all it was possible under the circumstances to do, to re-establish order and good Government. I also gained over the Zumeendars of Bijnore and led them to an engagement with the Rebels; but unfortunately we sustained a repulse, and I was forced to fly to Chandpoor. There, however, I found myself surrounded by the enemy, and had well nigh despaired of life; but it was destined that I should live, and with the utmost difficulty I succeeded in escaping to Meerut, where I continued to reside until we returned, triumphantly to Bijnore on the 25th April 1858, on the re-occupation of the District."²

Sayyid Ahmad Khan stayed in Meerut for a little over five months. Here he came to know about the sufferings of his family at Delhi and reached there towards the end of September. His uncles and cousins¹ had been killed. His mother was living miserably in a stable with a pauper woman, Zaibun. Sayyid Ahmad Khan knocked at the door and called the inmates. His mother recognized his voice and cried out: "Why have you come here? Here people are being killed. You go back. We shall face whatever is ordained for us." When Sayyid Ahmad Khan assured her that he had the necessary permission from the officials and that he had already contacted the Governor of Delhi and other British officers, she was a bit satisfied. Sayyid Ahmad was shocked to find that his mother and others were living

² *An Account of the Loyal Muhammadans of India*, Part I, pp. 13-17.

on fodder and did not have water for days. He took a jug and went out in search of water. He found that there were no buckets on wells and there was utter wilderness all round. He then went to the Fort and brought a jug-full of water. When he reached the house he found Zaibun sitting on the road with a pitcher in her hands. She had also come out in search of water but, due to exhaustion and fatigue, she could not proceed further and fell on the ground completely broken. Sayyid Ahmad Khan gave a glass of water to her and asked her to drink it. With trembling hands she tried to pour that water in her pitcher, and muttered something pointing towards the house. She wanted to take the water for her thirsty mistress—mother of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Sayyid Ahmad gave some water to her and asked her to drink it first as he had enough water for others. Then Sayyid Ahmad Khan took the water to his mother and aunt. When he came out to arrange for some carriage to take his family to Meerut, he found Zaibun lying dead on the ground.

Sayyid Ahmad brought his family to Meerut where it stayed in the house of one Munshi Altaf Husain Sarishtadar. His mother could not recover from the intense shock and nervous strain that she had suffered at Delhi. She breathed her last within a few weeks of her arrival there.

In a lecture delivered some 32 years after the Revolt of 1857, Sayyid Ahmad Khan referred to the terrible reactions that the events of 1857 had produced in him:

After the Revolt I was grieved neither on account of the plunder of my house nor on account of the loss of property that I had suffered. What saddened my heart was the misery and destruction of people..... When Mr. Shakespear offered to me the *taluqa* of Jahanabad, which originally belonged to a distinguished Sayyid family, and yielded an annual rental of more than a lac rupees, as a reward for my services, my heart was deeply hurt. I said to myself:

How can I accept this *jagir* and become a *taluqadar* while all the people are in distress. I refused to accept it and said that I no longer wished to stay in India. In fact it was so. At that time I could never imagine that the people would be able to make up leeway and would regain their lost respect and prestige. The condition of the people at that time was a touching sight. For some days I was under the spell of grief and suspense. Believe me that this grief and concern brought senility to me and turned my hair grey. When I came to Moradabad, a town full of sad memories of the destruction of our aristocracy, my grief increased all the more. But at that time I thought that it would be extremely unmanly and cowardly on my part to find refuge in some safe corner and leave the people helpless and in distress. No! I should share their distress and strive hard to avert the calamity by lifting up their hearts. I gave up the idea of migrating and chose to work for my people.

The upheaval of 1857 had different reactions on different minds. There were some who were not prepared to accept the change—political, social or economic—which had come in the wake of the British occupation of the country. Ostrich-like they hid their heads in the sand of time and thought that the storm would blow over without affecting them. There were others who accepted the change instantly and instinctively and threw themselves in the main-stream of time. There was a third group which sat on the fence and watched the outcome of the struggle and deferred its decision till the issues were clear. Sayyid Ahmad's appraisal of the situation was realistic and once he had considered the problem in all its aspects, he threw himself headlong in the breach without hesitation. He thought that the situation could be well utilized by the Indians for accelerating the process of change from the medieval to the modern pattern of life. Resistance to the British would be futile because it

would be a fight of ignorance against knowledge and would ultimately lead to ruin and defeat. Disastrous consequences of the movements of 1831 (Balakot) and 1857 demanded a fresh appraisal of the situation and a more intelligent analysis of the factors underlying these failures. Realism demanded giving up politics for a while and concentrating on the educational uplift of the people. Education alone could extricate the people from their miserable predicament. With great tact and wisdom Sayyid Ahmad Khan worked for the realization of his objectives even though he continued in Government service. In fact his continuance in Government service, at least in its early stages, proved helpful in the work he had set his heart upon.

On February 16, 1858, Mr. Shakespear received instructions at Bijnor to proceed to Roorkee. Sayyid Ahmad Khan also went with him. Here the Rohilkhand column was formed. When the British forces were about to enter Rohilkhand, Sayyid Ahmad insisted that only those people be treated as rebels who oppose the entry of British forces and not those who had earlier taken part in the disturbances. He wanted to protect Nawab Mahmud Khan in this way but minor skirmishes with the British army when it entered Najibabad and Nagina led to a general massacre in that area and the British officers killed a large number of people as rebels. Thousands of innocent people suffered due to the personal animus or grudge of the informers; but Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not use his influence to wreak vengeance on those who had been hard on him. In fact he saved many families from destruction and exercised his influence in the direction of tempering justice with mercy. The British Government offered him a big jagir in Chandpur and Bijnor but he refused to accept it as his conscience did not permit him to accept an estate which had been confiscated from his fellow countrymen. He, however, accepted a special pension of Rs. 200 per mensem, which was to continue during the

lifetime of his son, and some robes and articles of honour.³ In April 1858, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was transferred to Moradabad as *Sadr us Sudur*. A year later he was appointed a member of the two man Special Commission to hear appeals regarding confiscated properties. For two years he worked on this Commission with a rare sense of responsibility.

It was during his stay at Moradabad that he wrote *Tarikh-i-Sarkashi-i-Bijnor* and *Causes of the Indian Mutiny*. In 1857, he established a Persian *madrassa* in Moradabad which was later merged with the Tehsili *Madrassa* established by Mr. Stratchey.

In 1860, a severe famine broke out in the North-Western Province. J. Stratchey, the Collector of Moradabad, entrusted him with the work of organizing relief. Sayyid Ahmad Khan did his job with great devotion and profound sense of duty. Nearly 14,000 starving people were supplied with food in one hour; the sick people were attended to in a dispensary which functioned round-the-clock. Special diet was provided for the sick people. To women who observed *pardah* and could not come to the relief centre he sent cotton for spinning and gave an allowance of eight annas per diem. He visited the relief centre twice every day, supervised every detail and personally enquired about every sick person. He even washed and spread out soiled clothes of people suffering from acute diarrhoea on account of long periods of starvation. His philanthropy and deep love for the people converted even his critics into admirers. Raja Jai Kishan Das is reported to have said:

³ These robes and articles were : a *Khil'at* of one cap of four cones, one *gashwara* or handkerchief, one *neem astin* or jacket, one shawl, one embroidered waist band, one *jēgāb*, i.e., jewelled plume for the turban, one *surpech*, i.e., ornament to be worn on the folds of the turbans, one pearl necklace and a sword, with belt, (*Ibid*, P. 35).

"When Sir Sayyid started his journal *The Loyal Muhammadans of India*, some of its sentences gave the impression that Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a fanatic who had no sympathy for Hindus. At that time I had also thought of bringing out a similar journal containing accounts of Hindus who had supported the British Government. In the meantime I happened to visit Moradabad. I went to the relief centre and met Sir Sayyid Ahmad whom I had not seen before. I referred to sentences which had given me the impression of his being a fanatic. He apologized and confessed that it was due to slip of pen. This was, however, a polite reply. But the affection and sympathy with which he was behaving with men of all religions and all castes made my heart absolutely clean towards him. I was in fact struck with wonder when I found what a noble soul he was. It was on that day that I established friendship with him, which went on increasing every day."

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was equally concerned about those starving people of respectable families who, on account of self-respect, hesitated to come to the relief centre. He made arrangements for supplying food to such people at night. He used the best available quality of grain in the kitchens. Besides food, he supplied essential clothing also. Despite all this, the total amount spent by the Government on the relief centre at Moradabad was much less than what was spent elsewhere. This is because all those people who were physically fit were put to work and their wages helped in defraying part of the expenditure on running the relief centre.

Apart from the official relief work, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his wife spent considerable money from their own pockets in helping the starving people. Every day food was distributed to people at his house.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan had accepted the administration of this relief centre on condition that all orphans would be handed over to the Hindu or the Muslim families as the case may be, and will not be entrusted to Christian missionaries. So long as Stratchey was in-charge of the district, this commitment was strictly respected, but when Power took over as Collector of the district, the Christian missionaries succeeded in persuading him to alter the arrangement. Sayyid Ahmad Khan resented this departure from the plighted word. Power convened a meeting to consider the matter.

As the Indians were completely subdued at that time, they did not have the courage to oppose their rulers. Only Sayyid Ahmad Khan and one or two others had the courage to express their disagreement with the Collector. So it was decided to take back all orphans from the Hindu and the Muslim families and to entrust them to the Christian missions. The reason given was that under the Muslims and the Hindus the orphans would be brought up as slaves. Sayyid Ahmad Khan had himself undertaken the responsibility of looking after four or five orphans. He had treated them so affectionately that when they left his house they wept bitterly.

This incident came as a great shock to Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He was depressed equally by the character of his countrymen as well as the behaviour of the Englishmen. The Indians lacked courage; the Englishmen went back on their plighted word when it suited them. To solve the immediate problem Sayyid Ahmad Khan thought of establishing an orphanage, both for the Hindus and the Muslims, at some central place in order to save the orphans from the Christian missionaries. But on further consideration he realised that this was only a temporary solution to a chronic problem and that nothing could be of any help to the Indians unless there was education on a mass scale.

In 1861, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's wife died at Moradabad. He was 44 years of age at that time and had two sons and one daughter. Despite all persuasions, he refused to marry again and devoted all his time and energy to work for the social uplift of the people. During his stay at Moradabad, Sayyid Ahmad edited Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*. He also thought of writing a commentary on the Bible and started arranging for a printing press, but before he could actually start work on this, he was transferred to Ghazipur. On May 12, 1862, Sayyid Ahmad Khan reached Ghazipur. Here he compiled *Tabyin-ul-Kalam* and thought of measures to improve the condition of the people and to remove illiteracy from amongst them. In 1863, he established the Scientific Society and prepared a scheme for the translation of English works into Urdu. In 1864, he established a *madrasa* at Ghazipur. Narayan Singh was elected its patron and visitor, and several committees were formed to look after the working of this institution. Provision was made in the *madrasa* for instruction in five languages—English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit. Later on this *madrasa* became the Victoria High School of Ghazipur.

In 1864, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was transferred from Ghazipur to Aligarh. It was here that he got an opportunity to give a definite shape to his educational and cultural aspirations. On August 15, 1867, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was promoted as a judge of the small cause court and was transferred to Benares. He remained in Government service till 1876 when he decided to retire and devote the rest of his life to the implementation of schemes and ideas that were bubbling in his mind. He had been in Government service for nearly 38 years but during all this period he managed to devote considerable time and attention to literary and social works. In fact many of his books were prepared during this period and the nucleus of his social and educational reform movement was formed at this time.

CHAPTER IV

VISIT TO ENGLAND

On April 10, 1869, Sayyid Ahmad Khan sailed for England. His two sons—Sayyid Mahmud and Sayyid Hamid—and his servant Chajju accompanied him. Sayyid Mahmud was granted a scholarship—first of its kind in the North-Western Provinces—for higher studies in England. Sayyid Ahmad's decision to accompany his son to England was determined by two considerations: he wanted to make a first-hand study of the system of education and the residential life at the British universities, particularly Oxford and Cambridge, and, secondly, he wanted to write *Essays on Islam*—a rejoinder to Sir William Muir's *Life of Muhammad*—for which he had to collect material from the libraries in England. It was quite an expensive proposition and he had lot of difficulty in collecting funds for his journey to England. He disposed of his library, mortgaged his house and property and borrowed money at a very high rate of interest. In spite of all this he could not live in London in a way he desired to.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan has given interesting details of his journey to England in a series of letters published in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*. These letters reveal what was uppermost in his mind and what were his aims and objectives in undertaking this journey to England. While on ship he met Miss Carpenter, about whom he writes:

"I had long and interesting conversations with her about female and general education, as well as about other important matters. Her want of knowledge of

Urdu and my want of knowledge of English was rather a drawback, but we got on well by using Mahmud and Khudadad Beg (who joined our party at Bombay) as interpreters. Miss Carpenter is a native of Bristol and she has made herself famous in her native town by her efforts in educating the children of the poor. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a great friend of hers and he died at her father's house whilst on a visit. It was his description of the sad state of Indian women that caused her voyage to India."

Miss Carpenter requested Sayyid Ahmad Khan to record in her note-book his views about the condition of Indian women. Referring to Miss Carpenter's efforts to improve the condition of the womenfolk, he wrote:

"..... To interest one's self in the education of woman, whom God hath made as an helpmate to man in good works, is worthy of every praise. To do good in every way is most laudable, as, if the foundation is good, good results must follow."

In Aden, Sayyid Ahmad Khan found Hindus living with honour and security. There he met a Hindu merchant about whom he remarks:

"He had been here for a long time, having, however, constantly visited Bombay. He told me that there were three Hindu temples in Aden, those of Mahadeo, Hanuman and another, the name of which I have forgotten, all of which had been built by contributions from Hindus visiting the place. I was delighted to find that Hindus could come so far across the ocean in steamers without losing their caste. God grant that the Hindus of my part of India will soon take this to heart."

On April 23, his ship reached Suez. He wanted to see the canal, but when he came to know that it was still in the

process of excavation, he dropped the idea. Subsequently, however, he met on board the ship *M. de Lesseps*, the builder of the Suez canal. Lesseps expressed the hope that when he returned from England, his vessel would pass through the canal. "It was a very great pleasure and honour to me", wrote Sayyid Ahmad, "to meet a man whose determination and pluck were equal to science, and who has not his equal in the whole world." What struck Sayyid Ahmad most was a speech of de Lesseps in reply to a congratulatory address presented to him by the people on board the ship. The address said that it was but proper that the canal was named after him. To this, Lesseps replied: "I shall feel more grateful and honoured, if instead of the canal being called by my name, it is called by that of France." Sayyid Ahmad applauded his love for his country and lamented the lack of such spirit in his own countrymen. Then he recorded his impressions of Egypt in the following words :

"From the cursory view of Egypt which I got, I was astonished. I have seen Malwa, which is thought to be the richest country as regards crops in India but Egypt beats it into a cocked-hat. Its land seems to be splendidly manured, and the canals, with their branches, are innumerable. As far as I could see, there was not a single field unwatered by a canal. The science of canal-making is hereditary in the Egyptians. On all sides were sluices for regulating the water-supply. Where the land to be irrigated is higher than the canal, a wheel with buckets is made, which, driven by a donkey, pony, or bullock, carries the water up and throws it into a channel. In India our practice is to throw the water up in baskets worked by two men—and the Egyptian method would certainly be an improvement on it. At one place I saw a well being worked—the water being raised by a Persian wheel similar to, but lighter and less expensive than, those in

use in the Karnal and Panipat districts. I saw ploughing going on like ours in India."

His accounts show that during this journey he was studying everything from the point of view of an Indian eager to imbibe and accept whatever was good in other countries and people. Whatever he saw in foreign lands he compared, often wistfully, with his own country. When he saw the Egyptians handling machinery with confidence, his mind at once went back to his "unfortunate fellow-countrymen" who could not use machinery with equal confidence. When his ship reached Italy and passed Capria and Straits of Bonifacio, he was anxious to see Corsica, "the birth place of the great Napoleon" and the cottage of Garibaldi. He wrote:

"I had a great desire to view the cottage of Garibaldi, the generous and the brave—that cottage which is more honoured and revered than the palaces of powerful rulers."

When he reached Marseilles it was night, but *en route* to his hotel, he had a look at the city.

"It was night as we drove through the first European city that I had ever been in, and I felt almost off my head as I gazed from one side of the streets—all splendidly lit up—to the other, and saw the rows of such brilliant shops as I had never seen before. The Diwali illuminations in India were nothing to them In one street there were a couple of shops which were particularly brilliant—their roofs also being of glass; while inside were various plants and creepers, including cypress-trees in China pots—beautiful chairs all about, and many people sitting in them, some few of them women—the whole lit up with glass. I thought that there must be a marriage going on in them but I found out afterwards that they were merely public refreshment-houses or *cafés*. How good

God is, that He enables even workmen to refresh themselves in such paradises as could never have been conceived by Jamshed!"

The sentiments expressed in the last sentence are particularly noteworthy. How intensely he longed for the same facilities for workmen in India!

Sayyid Ahmad Khan hired a two-horse carriage in Marseilles and went out sight-seeing. He was particularly pleased with the beauty of the zoological garden. He left Marseilles on April 30 and the train carried him swiftly and smoothly through the plains and fields of France, but his mind constantly went back to his own homeland—"the potatoes of Meerut and the roses of Ghazipore". He remarked that the natural beauty of these regions had been "doubled by the skill of man". On the morning of May 2, he reached Paris and stayed at the Meurice Hotel. He visited Versailles and was astounded at the lovely lakes, canals and fountains of that place, but so far as the buildings were concerned, he could not help observing:

"India's royal buildings differ from those of France, owing to the climate. The houses in France are well adapted to its climate. Ours in India require to be altered in order to be beautiful, to be healthy. At the same time, our buildings in India are much more strongly built than those here; and there is nothing to match the lovely Taj and its minarets—that monument of grace and honour to our ancient architecture."

Sayyid Ahmad was greatly pleased to see the picture-galleries, particularly the pictures depicting French battles. "It is not merely a picture-gallery", he remarked, "but a means of increasing the courage, boldness and valour of the nation." He was, however, distressed to see the paintings depicting the capture of the family of Abdul Qadir of Algiers. "The women are shown on camels, with the French

soldiers throwing them off. The bodies of the women are partially naked, and the French have bayonets in their hands as if they are going to kill them. Was it right or proper of the French to hang up in their palace a picture of women being taken prisoners?" he remarked. He then paid a glowing tribute to Abdul Qadir in these words:

"Imam Abdul Qadir is a valiant and true soldier, and is as much honoured now as he was when he was ruler of his country. Alone and unaided he fought for twenty years with the greatest bravery and truthfulness, with no breath of intrigue or cunning upon his name. At last he was conquered; but that does not lessen his valour or his honour."

It is significant that Sayyid Ahmad Khan had deep and sincere sympathy for all leaders of freedom struggles, whether in Europe or in Africa. He was all admiration for men like Garibaldi and Abdul Qadir, and on one occasion, he even praised the valour and determination of the Irish people in their movement for independence.

On the 4th of May, Sayyid Ahmad Khan reached London. He stayed there till September 1870. Besides paying social visits to eminent persons, most of his time was spent in ceaseless literary activity and in a serious and thoughtful study of the life and conditions of the people of England. He met political leaders like Lord Lawrence, Lord Stanley of Alderley, Duke of Argyll, the Marquis of Lome and other British statesmen; he participated in various literary activities and was present at the last reading given by Charles Dickens, and met Carlyle and had a long talk with him about his book *Heroes and Hero-worship*. He visited universities, saw factories, joined clubs, attended functions and mixed with people belonging to different strata of society.

Thus, during his stay in England, he saw almost every aspect of life in Britain. His mind was all the time busy

formulating schemes for emulating these British achievements in his own country.

On July 13, 1869, he attended a dinner given by the Smeatonian Society of Civil Engineers. Amongst those present at the dinner were Lord Lawrence, Lord Alfred Churchill, Thaiszelek of Pesth, Baron Joachunis, Murray, etc. He made a speech in Urdu on this occasion. Lord Lawrence translated it into English and the people were deeply impressed by his clarity of thought and seriousness of purpose. During his stay in London, he was made an Honorary Member of the Athenaeum Club. On November 6, he was invited to see the opening ceremony of the Holborn Viaduct to be performed by Queen Victoria. In a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Scientific Society on October 15, 1869, he wrote:

"It is nearly six months since I arrived in London, and have been unable to see many things I should have liked; nevertheless, I have been able to see a good deal, and have been in the society of lords and dukes at dinners and evening parties. Artisans and the common working-men I have seen in numbers. I have visited famous and spacious mansions, museums, engineering works, ship building establishments, gun-foundries, ocean-telegraph companies which connect continents, vessels of war (in one of which I walked for miles, the Great Eastern Steamship), have been present at the meetings of several societies, and have dined at clubs and private houses....."

In a number of letters written to his friends in India he has given his impressions of the new world. According to an English newspaper, *St. James' Budget*¹, the "dreamy philosophy (of these letters) recalls some of the best pages in that most fascinating of books of travel, *The Memoirs of*

¹ October 31, 1885

Baber." In a letter addressed to Raja Jai Kishan Das, he wrote:

"What I have seen and seen daily, is utterly beyond the imagination of a native of India. If any of my countrymen do not believe what I say, you may certainly put them down as frogs and fishes. There was once a living fish that fell from a fisherman's net into a well in which were a number of frogs. When they saw a new traveller, white in colour, and glittering like silver, they behaved very kindly to him, and asked where he came from. The fish said that he was a native of the Ganges. The frogs asked the fish if his watery country was similar to theirs; to which the fish answered in the affirmative, adding that it was a bright, good country, swept by a fine wind, which raised waves in which fishes were rocked as in a swing, and disported themselves, and that it was very broad and long. On hearing this a frog came out a foot from the side of the well, and said, "What! As long and as broad as the distance I have come from the well?" The fish said, "Much greater." The frog came another foot out, and again put his question to the fish, which said, "Much greater." The frog went on getting the same answer the further he went, until he got to the opposite side of the well. Asked the same question, the fish gave the same reply. The frog said, "You lie; it cannot be larger than this." Just at this moment a man let down a bucket and drew water thus causing small waves on the surface. The frog asked the fish if his country's waves were as large, on which the fish laughed, saying, "Those things that you have never seen, and which it is impossible for you to imagine, cannot be thought of by you without seeing. Why, therefore, do you ask about them?"

He was impressed by the literary interests and activities

of the women of England.

"Is it not a matter for astonishment that a woman, when ill should read with the object of improving her mind? Have you ever seen such a custom in India in the family of any noble, nawab, raja or man of high family? If our women in India were to frequent the bazars with faces uncovered, how astonished and alarmed would not their husbands be? It is undoubtedly a fact that the women here, when they hear that the women of India are unable to read or write, are ignorant of education or instruction, are equally astonished, and are displeased with and despise them."

His national pride was deeply hurt when he found in the India Office Library an illustrated book on the manners and customs of the Indian people which painted the Indians as almost barbarians and all the young English Civil Servants who came to India read this book in order to acquaint themselves with the life and conditions of the people whom they had to govern.

Looking critically at the conditions prevailing in India, he remarked:

"I am extremely pleased that my Bengali and Parsi brethren have begun to some extent to promote civilization but their pace is so fast that there is danger of their falling. The fatal shroud of complacent self-esteem is wrapt around the Mahomedan community: they remember the old tales of their ancestors, and think that there are none like themselves."

Then his mind began investigating the causes of his country's backwardness. "Until the education of the masses is pushed on as it is here, it is impossible for a native to become civilized and honoured," he remarked. Elaborating his point further, he said:

"The cause of England's civilization is that all the arts and sciences are in the language of the country. Those who are really bent upon improving and bettering India must remember that the only way of compassing this is by having the whole of arts and science translated into their own language. I should like to have this written in gigantic letters on the Himalayas, for the remembrance of future generations."

In England his one great concern was to exhort his own countrymen to prepare themselves for a determined struggle against illiteracy and ignorance. In a letter to Raja Jai Kishan Das, he wrote:

"O well-wishers of Hindustan! Do not place your dependence on anyone. Spread abroad, relying on yourselves and your subscriptions, translate works of arts and sciences; and when you have mastered these and attained to civilization, you will think very little of going into Government service. I hope and trust that such a day may soon come."

On account of paucity of funds, Sayyid Ahmad Khan had to forgo many opportunities of meeting people and had to refuse many invitations. In a letter from London, he wrote: "Do you know how much it costs to hire a carriage? Rs. 10 for each trip. Just now I have before me 30 letters seeking interviews and 15 visiting cards and all these are from nobles, lords and knights. I could not visit them on account of paucity of funds."

In London, Sayyid Ahmad Khan started writing a book on Islam in which he answered the criticism and comments made against Islam by Sir William Muir in his *Life of Muhammad*. He collected together a large number of works on the subject from Germany, France and Egypt and burnt the mid-night oil in studying them. He wrote to a friend that continuous work at the table for hours together made his back ache. He consulted the libraries of the India Office and

the British Museum: the former he calls "a city" and the latter a "big jungle" of books. William Muir's prejudiced and biased remarks about the Prophet caused him such poignant distress that he made "up his mind to complete his work in England even if he was reduced to abject penury.

On August 6, 1869, the insignia of the Companionship of the Star of India was conferred on him. He gives the following account of the ceremony:

"On Friday, the 6th of August 1869, I drove to the India Office to receive the insignia of the Companionship of the Star of India. The rest of the recipients were also present. We were received by Mr. (afterwards Sir John W.) Kaye, Secretary of State for India, who shook hands with us all, and spoke a few courteous and congratulatory words to each of us. After a short interval, Mr. Benthall, private secretary to His Grace, entered the room where we were assembled, and shaking hands with me, asked me to accompany him into an adjoining room, where the Duke was seated without any appearance or surroundings of ceremony and rising, received me very graciously, shook me by the hand, and introduced me to his son, the Marquis of Lorne, who was present on the occasion. He conversed with me very kindly for some minutes, and inquired after my sons, especially about their education and the progress of their studies. He spoke in English, of course, and I answered him as well as I could in that language, and only regret that I could not speak as correctly and fluently as I could have wished. His Grace then presented me with the Star, together with the royal warrant bearing the signature of the Queen, appointing me a "Companion of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India" and after congratulating me on the great distinction that had been conferred upon me permitted me to retire.

The other recipients having been similarly summoned and invested with the Star, we were all asked to lunch by the Duke, and sat down to a really splendid luncheon, the Duke taking the head of the table, and I, at his invitation, taking the seat on his left. Many influential men, members of Parliament, and others, were present; amongst others, Sir Bartle Frere, whom I had already met before, and with whom I had a long conversation. After lunch the Duke retired, shaking hands with all present; but the rest of us continued at table over the dessert, and chatting for some time after."

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's visit to England was the most significant event in his life. Here he made a first-hand study of all the important English and Scottish universities and minutely examined their working and curricula of studies. It was here that he formulated his future plans and chalked out the details on which he had to model the halls and hostels, the class-rooms and the lecture-theatres of the M.A.O. College. "If you had come here," he wrote to a friend, "you would have seen how training is given to children and how knowledge is acquired and imparted and how a nation attains a position of honour. God willing, I will explain to you all this on my return and will put it into practice." Day and night he discussed the problems of Indian education with his friends, sons and Indian visitors in England. Being impatient to put his ideas into practice, he wrote to Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk to found an association before he reached India so that he might start his work immediately on arrival.

During his stay in London, Sayyid Ahmad Khan came to know about the language agitation in India. It distressed him deeply because he found in it the seeds of future discord and strife. He wrote to Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk on April 29, 1870:

"I have received another news which has caused deep

grief and anxiety to me. (It is) that at the initiative of Babu Shiv Prasad Sahib, Hindus have asked agitatedly that the Urdu language and the Persian script, which is a legacy of the Mussalmans, be obliterated. I have heard that they have approached the Hindu members of the Scientific Society and have asked that the journal be published in Hindi instead of Urdu and the books also be translated into Hindi. This is a move on which Hindus and Muslims can never have an agreement. The Muslims will never agree on Hindi and if the Hindus insisted on Hindi they would never agree on Urdu—and the result of it would be that the Muslims would go their way and the Hindus theirs. There may not be anything in it to be afraid of. (On the contrary) I think that if the Muslims carry on their work independent of the Hindus they will be in advantage and the Hindus will be in disadvantage. But I think of two aspects of the matter: first, my own temperament is such that I want the welfare of all inhabitants of India, whether Hindu or Muslim. Secondly, I am particularly afraid of the fact that the Muslims are all under the shadow of misfortune and adversity. They are involved in false and absurd fanaticism and they do not in the least realize what is harmful to them. Besides, they have greater jealousy, rancour and hollow boastfulness than the Hindus, and are more poverty-stricken also. Due to these reasons they would never be able to do anything for their betterment themselves."

On October 2, 1870, Sayyid Ahmad reached India from England and resumed charge of his duties at Benares in the same month. His views on education had now taken definite shape and he was anxious to translate them into practice as early as possible.

CHAPTER V

MOVEMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Sayyid Ahmad found in education the panacea to all ills—social, political and economic—of the contemporary Indian society. If the people were educated, he believed, every evil would disappear; if not, they would themselves disappear. Addressing a public meeting at Amritsar, on January 29, 1884, he said: "If the Government has not given some of our rights to us as yet for which we may have a grudge, higher education is a thing, which, willy nilly, would oblige them to give (those rights) to us."¹

The problem of educational backwardness was much more acute amongst the Muslims² than amongst the Hindus because the Muslims had refused to move with the times and had remained wedded to old modes of thought and behaviour. Amongst the Hindus the movement for receiving Western education had already been initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen and the initial hurdles having been removed, a favourable climate had been created. Sayyid Ahmad's interest in education had begun soon after 1857. But his ideas developed gradually and it was many years afterwards that his views on education assumed the form of an educational movement.

¹ *Lectures*, p. 189

² Some Muslims at this time thought of starting an English newspaper but to Sayyid Ahmad Khan's great surprise, they could not find a single educated Muslim in the entire country to edit it. *Ibid*, p. 258.

Madrasah at Moradabad

In 1859, Sayyid Ahmad established a Persian *madrasah* at Moradabad and wrote a small pamphlet, both in Urdu and English, about the need and value of education. In this brochure, he criticised the vernacular schools established by the Government and declared that they were utterly inadequate to serve the needs of the time. He advised the Government to provide instruction in the English language so that the Indians could derive real advantage from it. While he accepted the principle that education in one's mother-tongue was better suited to the growth of a child's intellect, he doubted whether the Indian languages could be used as media of instruction. He criticized the policy of the Government which aimed at giving only that much education to the Indians as would qualify them for earning their livelihood. The purpose of education, he remarked, should be to awaken the intellect and help in the building up of an enlightened and integrated moral personality.

Establishment of the Scientific Society

The establishment of the Scientific Society at Ghazipur is another land-mark in the educational movement of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. In 1863, he published an appeal to all people of India regarding improvement in the educational system of the country. The purport of this appeal was to persuade people to establish an association for translating standard classical works of English into the Urdu language and thus attract the people to the study of English literature. With this aim in view, he established the Scientific Society. "It was," writes the author of the Sayyid's life in the Natesan series, "an honest attempt on the part of Sir Syed to bring Hindus and Mahomedans on one common non-controversial platform."³ The Duke of Argyle, then Secretary of State for India, accepted its patronship, while the Lt.-Governors of the

³ Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, pp. 18-19.

Punjab (Mr. MacLeod) and the North-Western Provinces (Mr. Drummond) became its vice-patrons. Sayyid Ahmad was elected its secretary. Both the Hindus⁴ and the Muslims joined it. Sayyid Ahmad went to Calcutta in order to propagate the aims and objects of the Society and addressed several meetings on the way. Addressing the first meeting of the Society on January 9, 1864, Lieut.

G. F. I. Graham observed: "For the first time in the annals of Hindostan has a Mahomedan gentleman alone and unaided thought over and commenced a Society in order to bring the knowledge and literature of the Western world within reach of the immense masses of the people of the east."

School at Ghazipur

In 1864, two months after the establishment of the Scientific Society, Sayyid Ahmad established a school at Ghazipur. Its foundation-stone was laid by Raja Dev Narain Singh and Maulana Muhammad Fasih—a fact which shows how deeply anxious he was to ensure Hindu-Muslim collaboration in his educational programmes. Its estimated expenditure was Rs. 80,000, but as soon as Rs. 17,000 had been collected it started functioning. Raja Dev Narain Singh was elected as its patron and visitor. Sayyid Ahmad Khan delivered a long and vigorous speech on this occasion, describing the new venture as a means "of spreading the light of learning amongst our countrymen and removing the clouds of darkness and ignorance which were enveloping us and this great country. This noble work will be not only profitable to ourselves and our contemporaries but to the coming generation, our sons and sons' sons. What gives me

⁴ The Executive Council of the Society had the following Hindu names on it: Roy Buldev Bukhsh, Baboo Haran Chandra, Lala Harbans Lal, *Aligarh Documents*, p. 13, Lala Lutchman Das was elected as the first treasurer, *ibid*, p. 14).

greater happiness and an occasion to congratulate you is the fact that this school has been brought into being by you without outside help." How closely the question of political progress was linked up in his mind with the educational advancement of his countrymen is clear from what he said in this very address:

"The admission of Indians to the Supreme Legislative Council is a beginning of the advancement of India. You remember my proposition that the day is not far off when I trust that the Council will be composed of representatives from every division or district and that the laws will be enacted by you and abided by you also. So ponder well how necessary it is for the people to advance in education and experience."

The fact that besides English, Urdu and Persian, the *madrasah* imparted instruction in Sanskrit also throws light on the character of the institution and the ideals and objectives of its founder.

Society Shifts to Aligarh

In 1864, Sayyid Ahmad came to Aligarh. Since he was the moving spirit of the Scientific Society, it could not function at Ghazipur in his absence and was shifted to Aligarh. W. J. Brimley, the judge of Aligarh, was elected as its President. He took keen interest in the affairs of the Society and gave a fillip to its literary activities. A separate building was constructed for the Society at a cost of approximately Rs. 30,000. The then Lt.-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, Mr. Drummond, laid its foundation-stone and Sayyid Ahmad himself supervised the construction of the building. On February 14, 1866, the Commissioner of Meerut, Mr. Williams performed its inauguration ceremony and paid eloquent tribute to the sincere efforts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in popularizing knowledge and learning in India.

The Scientific Society was a very active body. Its meetings were held several times a month and papers were read on topics of popular and academic interest. Every month, Dr. Kilkelly delivered a lecture on some aspect of natural science and performed actual experiments before the audience. The Society had a monthly budget of Rs. 500, a fairly big amount in those days. Due to the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, many important and valuable English works were translated into Urdu. The subjects on which he laid great emphasis included mechanics, electricity, pneumatics, natural philosophy and modern farming. On mathematics alone he assigned 17 books for translation to Maulvi Zakaullah. History had special fascination for him because one of the problems which constantly exercised his mind after 1857 was an analysis of the factors which led to the rise and fall of nations and communities. There is hardly any article from his pen during this period in which he does not pose this problem. Ultimately, he came to the conclusion that a nation which refused to accept and imbibe the contributions of other nations in the sphere of learning was bound to go down. A knowledge of world history, he used to say, could avert many a crisis. He looked upon history as a living and breathing account of human achievements and failures which could help in avoiding pitfalls and errors in our present-day life. History as a mere chronicle of rulers and a record of their campaigns was meaningless and purposeless. He liked Rollin's *History of Ancient Nations* because it went deep into the intellectual and social achievements of the people. He got Elphinstone's *History of India*, Malcolm's *History of Persia* and Rollin's *History of Ancient Egypt* translated into Urdu. He supervised personally all this translation work—often asked the translators to give additional notes, and himself improved the style and added illustrations to these works.

In 1866, the number of journals and papers subscribed by the Society, including complimentaries, had reached 44. Of

these, 18 newspapers and magazines were in English; the rest in Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit.

Agricultural and Technical Education

The work of the Society was not confined to translations only. "One of the chief objects aimed at by the Scientific Society," Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote to J. H. Prinsep, Collector of Aligarh, "is the introduction of improved methods of agriculture into India by which the condition of the people may be improved and the revenue of the empire augmented."⁵ With this aim in view, he got the works of Robert S. Burn and C. Towlinson translated into Urdu and laid great emphasis on instruction "in the science of mechanics—a knowledge of which will enable them (the Indians) to understand and to use many European instruments and mechanical appliances whose introduction would be of the greatest possible benefit to India."⁶

On December 13, 1865, Sayyid Ahmad sent a memorandum to the Government of the North-Western Provinces on behalf of the Society, seeking its aid in the compilation of books on agriculture. He offered to give these publications in return if the Government agreed to give some annual financial help to the Society. The Government agreed in August 1866 to purchase books worth Rs.500, but these books could not be prepared because Sayyid Ahmad Khan had many other pressing demands on his time. He, however, wrote a small *risala*, *Qadim Nizam-i-Dehhi-i-Hindustan*, on agriculture. It is preserved at the India Office Library.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan took keen interest in the affairs of the Society. He not only gave his time to it but spent a considerable amount on it from his own pocket. He donated his personal press, valued at Rs. 8,000, to it. In June 1866,

⁵ *Aligarh Documents*, p. 71

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 72.

the Begum of Bhopal presented to him a diamond ring worth Rs. 1,000 as a token of appreciation for his services to the cause of education. Sayyid Ahmad donated this ring to the Society. Anxious to improve the financial position of the Society, he started delivering lectures on law to the *Mukhtars* of Aligarh and credited the tuition fees to the funds of the Society.

In 1866, Sayyid Ahmad persuaded the zamindars of Aligarh to send a memorandum to the Government requesting that since, besides land revenue, one rupee was realized from them towards the provision of educational facilities, it was but fair that the people were also associated with the work of organizing education in their respective districts. It suggested the formation of a committee in each district, comprising local officials, officers of the educational department and the local zamindars to supervise this work. The Lt. Governor accepted the suggestion and committees were formed on an experimental basis in Aligarh and Etawah. Subsequently, similar committees were set up in all the other districts of the North-Western Provinces. But these committees failed to discharge the duties assigned to them. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was shocked and disillusioned to find that the presence of Indian members on these committees served no useful purpose as they did not take any interest in their work. In 1872, he felt constrained to write to the Government that these committees had ceased to perform the functions which were assigned to them. "The Indian members sit in these committees like the wax figures in Madam Tussaud's exhibition," he said.

In 1877, the constitution of these committees was amended but this did not basically alter the position. The Indian members continued to sit as disinterested spectators in these committees. In 1882, Sayyid Ahmad expressed his great disappointment at the performance of these committees before the Education Commission.

In 1866, Sayyid Ahmad started a journal on behalf of the Scientific Society, known as *The Indian Institute Gazette*. It was a weekly in the beginning but subsequently it was published twice a week. Sayyid Ahmad took upon himself the entire responsibility for editing it and supervising its printing. Barring a few, all its editorials were written by him. On his transfer to Benares on August 15, 1867, he left the work of the Society under the charge of Raja Jai Kishan Das, then Deputy Collector at Aligarh. The Raja evinced keen interest in the working of the Society and got its building completed and regularly published its journal. Sayyid Ahmad used to send articles for the journal from Benares and even from England. He strongly believed that the Society as well as its journal should, under all circumstances, retain their independent character and should not become subservient to the Government. He wrote to Raja Jai Kishan Das from London:

"I am delighted to hear that the Lieutenant-Governor, North-West Provinces, and the Director of Public Instruction, North-West Provinces, have given our Society great assistance; and I have thanked God for it. But, my dear Raja, do not part with the freedom of your Society and its paper."

On August 1, 1867, Sayyid Ahmad sent a memorandum to the Viceroy in which he particularly asked for the following:

- (a) Arrangements for higher learning in different arts and sciences through Indian languages;
- (b) Examination in Indian languages;
- (c) No discrimination in granting degrees to those who pass their examinations in Urdu as against those who pass in English; and
- (d) The establishment of a faculty of Urdu at the

Calcutta University or a separate university for imparting instruction in Indian languages in the North-Western Provinces.

While submitting the scheme for a vernacular university, Sayyid Ahmad offered help on behalf of the Scientific Society in getting English works translated into Urdu. The Government gave sympathetic consideration to this memorandum and very competent persons like Master Pyaray Lal, Maulvi Zakaullah and Pandit Dharm Narayan offered their services for translation work, but the scheme did not materialize.

Reaction to Urdu-Hindi Controversy

In 1867, some leading Hindus of Benares initiated a campaign for replacing Persian and Urdu in the courts by Hindi written in the Devanagri script. According to Sayyid Ahmad himself this was the first occasion when he felt that the time for the parting of ways between the Hindus and the Muslims had come. One day when he was discussing some educational problem with Mr. Shakespear, the Collector of Benares, the latter was surprised at his exclusive approach to the problem and could not help asking him: "It is for the first time today that I am hearing from you about your concern for the progress of the Muslims alone. Previously you always considered the welfare of all Indians." To this the Sayyid replied that the raising of the language issue had rendered rather gloomy the chances of large-scale collaboration and co-operation between the Hindus and the Muslims. Soon afterwards Allahabad emerged as a great centre for pro-Hindi propaganda and a number of controversies relating to the language cropped up. Sayyid Ahmad followed these controversies with great concern as they seemed to dash to the ground all his hopes and aspirations of the earlier years. He replied in the papers to every controversial issue that was raised. Slowly but surely as the controversy developed Sayyid Ahmad became more

and more exclusive in his thinking. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's visit to England (1869-1870) was a landmark in the formulation of his educational programmes. There he visited many educational institutions, studied their organizational set-up, met large number of scholars and attended all types of meetings. This gave him a thorough insight into the educational system of the West and also made him sadly conscious of all that remained to be done in India in order to attain some standard of enlightenment and culture.

The greatest obstacle to the spread of Western education in India seemed to be religious superstition amongst the Muslims and their hatred towards English education. To remove their misgivings Sayyid Ahmad Khan started a journal known as *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq* which was intended to persuade the Muslim community to come out of its narrow medieval grooves and take up the challenge of the time. Simultaneously with it, he founded a 'Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning Among the Muhammadans of India'. He was elected its secretary. The purpose of this committee was to find out the reasons as to: (a) why Muslim students were so few in number in the Government schools and colleges; (b) why the old learning was on the decline amongst the Muslims; and (c) why the Muslims had not taken to new sciences and learning. The first meeting of this committee was held on December 26, 1870, at Benares. Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, who was one of the supporters of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in his various social and educational programmes, reached Benares a day before the meeting. Sayyid Ahmad provided a bed for him in his own room. Till about 11 o'clock in the night both of them discussed various problems connected with the education of the Muslims. Mohsin-ul-Mulk then went to sleep. Somehow he woke up at 2 o'clock and was surprised to find that Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not in his bed. He came out of the room to find out where he had gone. He was dazed to see him strolling in the verandah and weeping

bitterly. Startled and worried, he asked the Sayyid if he had received any tragic news from somewhere. On hearing this, the Sayyid began to sob and said: "What greater calamity can there be! The Mussalmans are declining and losing ground. There seems no way for their betterment. Perhaps something good would come out of the meeting tomorrow." It was with such profound concern for the educational and intellectual uplift of his community that Sayyid Ahmad Khan launched his educational scheme.

A prize was announced on behalf of the committee for the best critical analysis of the problem of education amongst Muslims in India. Thirty-two essays were received. The first prize was awarded to Sayyid Ashraf Ali M.A., a student of Benares College. Sayyid Ahmad Khan prepared an analytical report on the basis of these essays. It was published by him from Benares in 1872 under the title: *Translation of the Report of the Members of the Select Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning Among the Muhamadans of India*. The most important finding of this committee was that it was necessary for the Muslims to make their own arrangements for education if they were to acquire Western knowledge while at the same time preserving their own rich oriental heritage. This report also outlined a scheme for the establishment of a college for the Muslims. Its copies were sent to the Government of India as well as to the Provincial Governments. The Secretary of State for India commended the scheme in a letter dated August 9, 1872, and promised Government assistance in its implementation. The work of collecting funds for the proposed college was then taken up and Sayyid Ahmad Khan was elected life secretary of a committee, *Khazinat al-Bazaar La-Tasis Madrasat al-Muslamin*, formed for the purpose of launching an all-India campaign for the collection of funds.

In July 1872, Sayyid Ahmad Khan issued a circular in order to elicit opinion about the location of the institution.

The opinion of the majority was in favour of Aligarh, probably because the people knew that after his retirement from service Sayyid Ahmad Khan intended to settle at Aligarh. In January 1873, a committee was formed consisting of Raja Jai Kishan Das, Mr. Lawrence, the Collector, Dr. Jackson, the Civil Surgeon, Mr. Hunt, the Executive Engineer, Muhammad Enayatullah Khan and Maulvi Mohd. Yusuf to select a suitable site for the college at Aligarh.

In February 1873, Sayyid Mahmud, his son, prepared a detailed scheme under his guidance about the organization of the institution and submitted it to the committee. In the introductory para, he said: "I think what we mean to found is not a college, but a university, and I hope the members will consent to my proposal that instead of the word college the word university may be substituted."⁷ Of the six basic principles on which the institution was to be founded, the following three are of particular significance:

"Firstly, the management of this institution shall be perfectly free from any control of the Government, beyond mere supervision.

"Secondly, that the university should secure for itself sufficient annual income to keep it independent of any external aid.

"Sixthly, that residence within the precincts of the university and under its discipline "should be as indispensable as education in the course of study itself."

These three principles throw considerable light on the aims and ideals of Sayyid Ahmad Khan with reference to the institution he was founding. He wanted to keep it completely free from Government control and emphasized also its basic

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 222.

residential character. As soon as this scheme was made public, a storm of opposition rose up from every direction. A Deputy Collector of Kanpur, Maulvi Imdad-al-Ali, was the first to criticize it. All sorts of apprehensions were then expressed about the motives of Sayyid Ahmad Khan; his religious views also came in for criticism; and from curriculum to buildings everything became the subject of discussion and debate. Some of the supporters of Sayyid Ahmad Khan were considerably disheartened by this opposition but the Sayyid revived their drooping spirits and advised them to increase their enthusiasm and activity in the same proportion as the opposition multiplied. Soon a network of sub-committees for the collection of funds appeared in the country and deputations were sent far and near for this purpose.

Sayyid Ahmad collected money for the proposed college through all possible means and methods—donations, lotteries, sale of pictures, books, etc. He asked people to donate to the fund on the occasion of various family functions. In the Aligarh exhibition he himself set up a book stall and sold books. He even put on a beggar's *jholi* and begged for money. On one occasion he staged a show and himself recited poems. It was a stupendous task to collect money from people who had no sympathy with his ideals and schemes. He, however, withstood all opposition and harassments, and persuaded, begged, entertained and entreated people in order to collect funds for the college.

Regardless of the strain on his health, Sayyid Ahmad undertook long journeys for the collection of funds. He bore all the travelling expenses from his own pocket and went from place to place begging for money and apprising the people of the supreme need of the hour. Whoever proposed to arrange feasts in his honour, was asked to donate that money to the fund. On his return to Aligarh, some 11 friends contributed Rs. 20 each for a dinner in his honour. He said that he would himself arrange for it and took the money

(Rs. 220), added to it his own contribution of Rs. 20 and donated the entire amount to the fund. It became his practice that on every occasion of family festivities and ceremonies, he donated the money which he would spend on feasts to the college fund. He did not give any *Walima* party on the occasion of the marriage of his son Sayyid Mahmud, instead contributed Rs. 500 to the college fund; the same thing was done on the occasion of the *Bismillah* ceremony of Sayyid Ross Masud, his grandson. For 28 years after his return from England the sole anxiety of Sayyid Ahmad Khan was to collect funds for the college of his dreams. In an article he says:

"We are now in such a predicament that even our friends are afraid of meeting us lest we ask them for some subscription or donation. Our face itself is now a silent beggar's bowl. I told a friend: Brother: It was ordained for me to beg so I fulfil the decree of my fate. But thank God that I am not begging for myself; but for my people."⁸

The M.A.O. College was established at Aligarh on May 24, 1875 and regular instruction was started from June 1, 1875. This was according to Gibb, "the first 'modernist' organization in Islam".⁹ The college was only a year old when Sayyid Ahmad Khan felt that his presence in Aligarh was necessary. He applied for pension and in July 1876 he retired from service and came to Aligarh. His sole concern from now onwards was the M.A.O. College and he dedicated all his time, money and energy to it.

On January 8, 1877, Lord Lytton, the Viceroy of India, laid the foundation-stone of the college. In his welcome address to Lord Lytton, Sayyid Ahmad Khan said:

⁸ *Hayat-i-Jaweed*, Vol. I, P. 210.

⁹ *Mohammedanism*, p. 181.

"The college of which your excellency is about to lay the foundation-stone differs in many important respects from all other educational institutions which this country has seen. There have before been schools and colleges founded and endowed by private individuals. There have been others built by sovereigns and supported by the revenues of the state. But this is the first time in the history of the Muhammadans of India, that a college owes its establishment not to the charity or love of learning of an individual nor to the splendid patronage of a monarch, but to the combined wishes and the united efforts of a whole community. It has its origin in causes which the history of this country has never witnessed before."¹⁰

Sayyid Ahmad wanted this college to act as a bridge between the old and the new, the East and the West. While he fully appreciated the need and urgency of imparting instruction in Western learning, he was not oblivious of the value of Oriental learning and wanted to preserve and transmit to posterity the rich legacy of the past.

Besides other subjects he was anxious to revitalize and revive on sound lines the teaching of Arabic and Persian. He was also eager to impart religious instruction to the students. He made arrangement for the teaching of Sanskrit and appointed one Pandit Kedar Nath for this purpose. In the matter of instruction in the English language and literature his ideals were the highest—"after the model of the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge". In a letter to Salar Jung, he wrote: "It is the chief aim and earnest endeavour of the committee to bring up scholars in their college to the same standard of learning as is attained by the students of the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the only distinction being that instead of the Christian faith taught in

¹⁰ *Hayat-i-Jaweed*, Vol. I, p. 210.

the English universities, the Muhammadan faith would be taught here."¹¹

Viewed as a whole, three principles seem to have guided the Sayyid's policy with reference to the M.A.O. College. While he was eager to enlist the support of the British Government for his educational programmes, he was not prepared to put the college management under Government control. Again and again he said that it was necessary to keep education beyond the pale of Government control. Secondly, his ideal was an institution on the model of Oxford and Cambridge. He emphasized the value of residential life in the development of a student's personality and gave considerable time and attention to the problems of their corporate life at the college. Thirdly, though the college was named as the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College and was intended primarily to cater to the needs of Muslims, he saw to it that its doors were open to all Indians. He envisaged a community institution and not a communal one. When the campaign for collection of funds for establishing this college was launched a large number of his Hindu friends contributed to it. The Rajas of Benares, Vizyanagram and Patiala made generous contributions to the college fund. Of the 50 rooms constructed, at least nine were built by Hindu donors like Chaudhari Shir Singh, Raja Dev Narain Singh and Lala Phul Chand. On the slabs of the Strachey Hall, there appeared 10 names of Hindu donors. In 1898, when Sayyid Ahmad Khan breathed his last, there were 285 Muslim and 64 Hindu students reading in different classes. Many of the Hindu students were residing in the hostels and all the necessary amenities were provided for them. Out of the seven Indian members on the staff of the college, at least two were Hindu. The Professor of Mathematics, J. C. Chakravarti, and the Professor of Sanskrit, Pandit Shiva Shankar, were eminent figures in the

¹¹ *Aligarh Documents*, p. 172.

academic life of the institution. Addressing the first session of the Education Commission in the North-Western Provinces at Ali-garh, Hunter remarked about the college:

"You, gentlemen, who have built this college, will bequeath a far nobler monument to posterity. You will have behind you a magnificent memorial, not of the discord, but of the reconciliation of races; a monument of beneficent energy, not of destructive force..... .Gentlemen, this college at Aligarh not only provides an education for the Muhammadans of the North-Western Provinces, but it stands forth as an example to all India, of a Muhammadan institution which effectively combines the secular with the religious aspects of education."

These remarks made by Hunter were in keeping with the spirit which had inspired Sayyid Ahmad Khan's action in founding the institution.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was appointed as a member of the Education Commission but he resigned his membership. However, in 1882, he appeared before the Commission and gave a detailed statement which shows his mature thinking on educational problems. He said that instead of increasing the number of schools, it was necessary to improve the standard of instruction. Quality, he observed, was more important than quantity. Asked as to how far education was the responsibility of the Government, he expressed the opinion that the people should themselves arrange for their education. "It would be more beneficial to the country if Government should leave the entire management of education to the people, and desist from interference," he remarked. This, in fact, was the guiding principle of Sayyid Ahmad's educational policy. He declared, both in public and private, that Government interference in education would be extremely baneful. Asked as to whether religious prejudices alone had kept the Muslims aloof from English education or

whether there was anything in their socio-political traditions which had the same effect, Sayyid Ahmad Khan replied:

"The causes which have kept the Muhammadans aloof from English education may be traced to four sources—to their political traditions, social customs, religious beliefs and poverty..... They were proud of their socio-political position..... They could never be brought to admit that sound and useful learning existed in any language except Arabic and Persian. They had given a peculiar form to moral philosophy, and had based it on religious principles, which they believed to be infallible; and this circumstance had dispensed, as they thought, with the necessity of European science and literature. I still remember the days when, in respectable families, the study of English, with the object of obtaining a post in Government service or of obtaining any other lucrative employment, was considered highly discreditable."

Interrogated on female education, Sayyid Ahmad refuted the idea that Muslim women of respectable families were ignorant. "A sort of indigenous education of a moderate degree prevails among them, and they study religious and moral books in Urdu and Persian, and in some instances in Arabic," he said. Concluding his discussion of the problem, he said that considering the then prevailing social and economic condition of the Muslims in India, the state of female education was satisfactory. "Any endeavours on the part of Government," he remarked, "to introduce female education among Muhammadans will, under the present social circumstances, prove a complete failure."

On the question of the medium of instruction, he said that in the vernacular and primary schools, it was better to provide instruction in the vernacular languages, but in English schools, established for the purpose of imparting European learning, it was essential to use English as the

medium of instruction. He said that his earlier view that Indian languages should be used as media of instruction had proved wrong and his attempts to get books translated through the Scientific Society and thus keep the people abreast of all development had proved unsuccessful. Intellectual advancement was not possible through translations. "I am forced to accept the truth of what an eminent liberal statesman has said, 'what the Indian of our day wanted, whether he was Hindu or Mohammedan, was some insight into the literature and science which were the life of his own time'.. I felt the soundness and sincerity of the policy adopted by Lord William Bentinck when he declared that 'the great object of the Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the nations of India'."

In 1883, Sayyid Ahmad Khan established the Muhammadan Civil Service Fund Association. He thought that if 500 Muslims contributed two rupees per month, it would bring an income of 1,000 rupees a month. This could be used in helping Muslim students to go to England to appear at the Civil Service examination or to study for any other university degree, professional or otherwise.

In 1886, Sayyid Ahmad Khan established the Muhammadan Educational Conference because he thought that a single college could not serve the educational needs of the entire Muslim population of India. He considered it necessary to organize a movement and create the necessary atmosphere for an extended educational activity. The objects of this conference were: (a) to promote Western education amongst the Muslims; (b) to make proper arrangement for religious instruction in institutions established by the Muslims; (c) to encourage the education of Oriental subjects and theology; and (d) to improve and raise the standard of old Indian *maktabs*.

For more than ten years, Sayyid Ahmad was the life and

soul of the Muhammadan Educational Conference. It was his keen desire to make this conference a powerful instrument for awakening the Muslim masses from their stupor and to apprise them of the urgent need of organizing their education effectively and speedily. It became a forum for the Muslim intelligentsia where they discussed the educational needs of their community and chalked out programmes for implementation. During the life-time of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, this conference was a kind of Muslim Brains Trust in educational matters.

CHAPTER VI

AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

Sayyid Ahmad Khan had to deal with a society which was in the meshes of medievalism, obscurantism, superstition and ignorance. In his attempt to extricate people from that predicament he had to face opposition from the conservative sections of society but he carried on his struggle with the determination of one who was convinced of the moral and ethical validity of his approach.

Sayyid Ahmad's task in the sphere of social reform was two-fold: first, he had to persuade people to give up habits and practices which stood in the way of social advancement, and secondly, he had to persuade them to accept the new scientific approach in all matters. He advised the Muslims:

(1) to develop freedom of thought and get out of the rut of custom and tradition. "So long as freedom of thought is not developed, there can be no civilized life," he declared;

(2) to get rid of those religious beliefs which had no real religious sanction behind them but stood as an obstacle to the growth of culture;

(3) to get rid of all religious and other superstitions;

(4) to educate women and to teach them handicrafts, etc;

(5) to make collective efforts for providing educational facilities; and

(6) to develop various arts and industries.

Muslim society presented a sad spectacle of inertia and degeneration in the post-1857 period. False sense of pride, reluctance to face the realities of life and indolence sustained by a false notion of religious otherworldliness had rendered the entire social structure rickety. Sayyid Ahmad Khan diagnosed every individual and collective ailment of the Indian society and what Matthew Arnold wrote about Goethe applies with striking aptness to him:

He took the suffering human race,
And read each wound, each weakness clear;
And struck his finger on the place,
And said: Thou ailest here and here.

He started a journal *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, also called *Mohammedan Social Reformer*, with the purpose of creating an awareness of the problems of modern life and in order to remove all those abuses which were eating into the very vitals of society. The Journal had a chequered career—it was started on December 24, 1870 and stopped publication after September 1876. It was re-started on April 23, 1879 and was regularly published till July 28, 1881. It was started for the third time on April 7, 1894 and stopped publication on February 2, 1897. Of the 459 articles that appeared in *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, 208 were written by Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself. These articles give an idea of the nature and impact of his activities in the field of social reform. His vigorous pen touched more upon social and educational subjects than political. A mere glance at the titles of some of his essays would give an idea of the range of his reform movement. They include such titles as culture, education, table manners, customs and ceremonials, self-help, national solidarity, freedom of speech and opinion, hypocrisy, fanaticism, rights of women, slavery, etc. There is hardly any aspect of social life which has not been touched and scrutinized by him with

his clarity of thought and expression. As was quite inevitable under the circumstances, a storm of opposition rose up as his ideas reached the orthodox sections of the Muslim society. The *Awadh Panch* ridiculed and parodied each and every idea of social reform which he put forward in these articles. Even scholars like Maulana Jamaluddin Afghani indulged in bitter, often sarcastic, criticism of his views. Some scholars went on the Hajj pilgrimage in order to obtain *fatwas* against him from the divines of Hijaz. Several books were written in which his approach towards religion and morality was criticised and condemned. He was called a *naychuri*, an atheist, a renegade and even antichrist, but nothing could dampen his spirits. He worked quietly, determined to achieve his ideal. "The more I am condemned, censured and reviled by people, the more I feel convinced of the need and urgency of the reform work I have undertaken," he used to remark.

One of the most baneful features of the feudalistic society of those days was a parasitic attitude which had bred inaction and indolence in the people. Sayyid Ahmad Khan persistently emphasized the need and urgency of action and assertion as essential for human survival. He said that indolence of heart was much more dangerous than the indolence of body. Action and struggle alone guarantee human progress and prosperity.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan believed that nothing retarded human progress more than a feeling of complacency that one had achieved perfection. According to him, progress was a continuous, unending process of struggle for improving things at all levels through all means. One should be always prepared to imbibe and accept the good habits and achievements of other peoples. An endless process of give and take is going on in human society and one would be either utterly ignorant or a fool to refuse to take advantage of what others had achieved in the realm of thought or action.

Some of the finest essays of Sayyid Ahmad Khan deal with such topics as culture, difference between culture and civilization and the essentials for the development of society on sound cultural lines. He approvingly quotes H. T. Buckle on the essentials of civilized life, but disagrees with his views on the role of the Government and religion in the development of culture and civilization. It was his firm conviction that in Asia, particularly in India, one of the factors responsible for degeneration and decay was that people expected everything to be initiated by their Governments. This excessive reliance on the Governments killed their spirit of initiative and struggle and made them lethargic and indifferent towards their own problems. "Unless the people begin to think (independently of the state), and decide what they have to do," he remarks. "the Indian Muslims would neither acquire wealth nor prestige, nor honour or status; neither would there be civilized life nor culture." He partly disagreed with H. T. Buckle about the role of religion also. "False religion," he remarks, "is doubtless an obstacle to civilized life, but genuine religion can never be an obstacle to human progress."¹ Religion, as he understood it, was love for mankind and service of humanity. Nothing is more lasting and valuable than efforts made for human betterment. The prophets have been sent for this purpose and hence this is the best and the noblest of works that can be done by any individual.

Sayyid Ahmad was severely critical of those social vices which, in his opinion, were responsible for the degeneration and the demoralization of people. He considered selfishness, lack of self-respect, habits of wasting time and indulging in loose talk, ignorance of the principles of hygiene and methods of sanitation, the institution of polygamy, and the waste of money on ceremonies as the causes of social backwardness and decay. He used to say that a society in

¹ *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, Vol. V. No. 13; dated Shawwal 1, 1291.

which individuals are selfish and self-centred cannot escape extinction. A deep and genuine sense of self-respect prevented people from doing many undesirable things. He condemned polygamy outright and said that it brought disgrace and slur on the Muslims. It is interesting that after criticising the vices which were responsible for social backwardness, Sayyid Ahmad Khan particularly commended agriculture and trade. According to him, the people could make real progress by improving agriculture and developing trade.

Sayyid Ahmad exhorted people to emulate nations which were culturally advanced. But at the same time he warned them against blind imitation. "Reject their undesirable habits but be quick to adopt and assimilate what is of value in their life and culture," was his advice. He considered literacy to be a *sine qua non* for real social and cultural progress. Man without education is like an unchiselled chip of a rock. Education gives him shape and lustre. Commending the study of world classics he remarked: "The student will learn to appreciate the temper with which great minds approach the consideration of great questions, he will discover that truth is many-sided, that it is not identical or merely co-extensive with individual opinion and that world is a good deal wider than his own sect, society or class."² It was with this aim and object in mind that he had founded the Scientific Society.

In an article entitled "Brutal Goodness", he says that goodness in an uncultured person is apt to produce undesirable results. It is culture which enhances the value of goodness. "This is why I persuade my people to meet cultured and civilized nations and visit civilized countries. It is a painful thought for me that whatever good qualities our people have are of an uncivilized type: mutual contact in worldly matters, cordiality between friends, religious spirit

² *Aligarh Documents*, p. 10.

amongst the religious-minded, affluence among the rich—each of these virtues finds expression in an uncivilized and uncultured manner. If this goodness is embellished with culture, it will be good for the people in this and the next world."³

When Sayyid Ahmad Khan asked people to accept the customs and practices of the West, he was severely criticised. The English were looked down upon as unclean and the Muslims hesitated in dining with them. Sayyid Ahmad took the initiative and started dining with them. He also wrote a *risala* to remove Muslim apprehensions in that respect. Some people boycotted him and carried a campaign to ex-communicate him. But Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not budge from the stand he had taken and tried to remove the misunderstandings of the Muslims. He looked upon blind adherence to custom as a serious stumbling block in the way of social reform. Persistently and with remarkable force of argument he asked people to give up blind adherence to customs and conventions which had lost all meaning and purpose. Respect for customs without an attempt at rational understanding of their significance was tantamount to killing all intellectual faculties. It led to intellectual paralysis by deadening the exercise of human reasoning. Every human institution, custom and convention should be tested on the counter of reason and if it is helpful in creating better conditions for human society it should be retained, if not, it should be discarded without any hesitation. The creation of this scientific attitude of mind was the inspiring motive of Sayyid Ahmad's reform movement and throughout his life he worked for it, ceaselessly and with devotion.

Another cardinal feature of Sayyid Ahmad's social and moral ideals was his emphasis on self-help. No society could make up leeway, he used to say, unless it developed the habit of self-help. "He was the first Indian," writes the

³ *Maqalat-i-Sir Sayyid*, pp. 84 -86.

author of the Sayyid's life in the Natesan series, "who taught the principle of self-help. When his prophetic vision recognized the needs of his people he did not resign himself to Fate or appeal helplessly to Government for aid. He knew that the reforms he aimed at, if they were to be accomplished at all, must be accomplished by the people themselves."⁴

Sayyid Ahmad Khan exercised profound influence on social thinking by emphasizing the need of developing virtues which give cohesion and unity to a society and ensure its growth on sound lines. "People who think that sincere friendship and cordial affection with people of other religions is forbidden," wrote Sayyid Ahmad Khan, "are mistaken. What God has put in human nature is true and absolutely true. We should have true love, friendship and affection for all people to whatever religion they might belong." To him religion connoted love not bickering, cohesion not conflict. While laying down the qualifications for a teacher of theology at the M.A.O. College, he plainly stated that he wanted him to inculcate humanism, broadmindedness, tolerance, affection and respect for moral and ethical values amongst the students. Fanaticism and exclusiveness, he used to say, are serious social vices. A closed mind is deprived of all healthy influences and remains in a perpetual state of social backwardness. "In us Mussal-mans a very serious defect has developed," he writes, "and it is this that sometimes by a mistaken sense of goodness we consider fanaticism as something good and whoever displays great fanaticism in religion and looks down upon followers of other religions and decries their arts and sciences is considered a praiseworthy person who is firm and orthodox in following his religion. But thinking in this way is a great mistake. In fact such an attitude has ruined the Mussalmans."

⁴ *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, p. 29.

True social life required every individual not to suppress the call of his conscience. If people acted according to their conscience, there would be a healthy social atmosphere, otherwise hypocrisy, flattery, orthodoxy and enmity would corrupt and corrode the society. Those who acted according to their conscience displayed great strength of character. They were bold in their action and thought and to them the society owed its essential elements of growth.

Restraint and regard for others are necessary for the well-being of every society. Difference of opinion should not give rise to mutual recrimination and acrimonious atmosphere. One should not allow his emotions to gain an upper hand while dealing with an opposite point of view. Restraint in dealing with a critic is a sign of the cultured mind and ensures healthy development of society.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan believed that Islam had given a better status to women than any other religion but the Muslims did not fulfil their religious obligations in this regard. He said that a happy home in which a woman was given an equal status with man could alone guarantee the well-being of society. He was, however, not in favour of the Anglicising of Muslim girls and approved the *pardah* observed in Muslim families of his day.

CHAPTER VII

LITERARY CONTRIBUTION

Despite his multifarious activities and exacting official preoccupations, Sayyid Ahmad found time for literary pursuits. The range of his literary interests was very wide : it covered history, politics, archaeology, journalism, literature, religion and science. But whatever he undertook, he saw to it that not only he himself made a contribution in that field but also created a band of enthusiastic workers round whom a school of thought soon developed. Though his own literary contribution is in no way meagre, the more important fact is that the Muslim intellectual activity, during the last hundred years or so, has mainly centred round him and has derived its inspiration from him. His editions of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, *A'in-i-Akbari* and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* have provided material for historical research in medieval Indian history; his *Asar-us-Sanadid* laid the foundation of archaeological studies in India; his *Tabyin-ul-Kalam* was the first attempt at a comparative study of religions; his *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq* served as a beacon's light to Urdu journalism; and his *Tafsir-ul-Qur'an*, the first of its kind, inspired generation after generation of Muslim scholars to attempt fresh exegetical analysis.

Historical Works

Sayyid Ahmad was keenly interested in history. His interest in the subject was born of a painful realization of the fact that the old order was in the process of liquidation and that it was necessary to preserve all that was of value in the past. Like Gibbon, whose interest in history was aroused in

the ruins of ancient Rome, Sayyid Ahmad was attracted towards historical studies by the ruins of Delhi and Agra. To preserve India's cultural heritage, Sayyid Ahmad wrote *Asar-us-Sanadid* and edited the works of Ziauddin-Barani and Abul Fazl, two of the greatest Indo-Muslim historians. He was the first Indian to write on archaeology in a scientific manner and he was also the first Indian to undertake a journey to England for purposes of research.

His books on historical subjects include:

(1) *Jam-i-Jum*; (2) *Asar-us-Sanadid*; (3) *Silsilat-ul-Muluk*; (4) *History of Bijnor*; (5) Edition of *A'in-i-Akbari*; (6) Edition of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*; and (7) Edition of *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*.

Though *Jam-i-Jum*¹ and *Silsilat-ul-Muluk* were mere compilations, much labour went into their preparation. *Jam-i-Jum* deals only with the Timurids, while the other book contains chronological and biographical data about all the rulers of Delhi known to history. Though Sayyid Ahmad took great pains in collecting and verifying the material contained in these books, they were not destined to bring him any credit as an author. That honour was reserved for *Asar-us-Sanadid*. Finding the Mughal Delhi at her last gasp, he decided to write an archaeological history of that unfortunate city. He wandered in the ruins of old Delhi, copying inscriptions, investigating facts and collecting data. He was so particular about the accuracy of the inscriptions on the Qutb Minar that he almost risked his life in an attempt to read, closely the legends on the Minar. He placed himself in a basket which was lowered from the tower and in this way he verified and copied the inscriptions. His dear erudite friend Sahbai, who was later ruthlessly killed by the British in 1857, used to accompany him on these historical

¹ Published in 1840. Noticed by Sir Henry Elliot and Professor Dowson in their *History of India*, Vol. VIII, pp. 430-31.

excursions. He would tremble at this sight but Sayyid Ahmad Khan carried on his work with the zeal of a lover, regardless of the risks involved in it.

The *Asar-us-Sanadid* comprised four chapters— three dealing with the buildings of Delhi, the last containing brief but informative notices of 120 scholars, saints, physicians, calligraphists, musicians and artists of Delhi. It was warmly received by his contemporaries. Edward Thomas, a well-known authority on numismatics, praised the "enthusiastic antiquary" for his "excellent Archaeological history of Delhi".² Raverty declared : "I dare say anything from the Sayyid's pen is valuable."³ M. Garcin de Tassy translated it into French and in 1864 the Royal Asiatic Society of London elected him as a Fellow in recognition of his "researches on Indian antiquities".

Next to *Asar-us-Sanadid*, Sayyid Ahmad's great contributions in the field of historical studies were his editions of the *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, the *A'in-i-Akbari* and the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. He got his edition of the *A'in* profusely illustrated with the pictures of Mughal ornaments, tents, flowers, etc. As one whose family had long been associated with the Mughal court and had intimate knowledge of the Mughal life and manners—though in its twilight—Sayyid Ahmad was best qualified to undertake this work. His illustrations enhanced the value of the work and Blochmann used them in his English translation of the *A'in*. Sayyid Ahmad Khan asked the famous Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib to write a few chrono-grammatic verses about the book. In his verses the Mirza observed that there was no use talking about the achievements of Akbar or of the value of *A'in-i-Akbari*; it was better to talk of the administrative achievements of the British. Since Sayyid Ahmad did not

² Chronicles of the Pathan Kings of Delhi, p. 20.

³ *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* (English translation), p. 718.

like this attitude of Ghalib, he did not incorporate his verses as an epilogue to his edition. The *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* was published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1862. Since its publication, hundreds of research workers on medieval Indian history have benefited from this edition. An account of Barani's life was published by him in the first issue of the journal of the Scientific Society. Later Sayyid Ahmad edited *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* and printed it in 1864 in his own press and under his own supervision.

During his stay at Bijnor, Sayyid Ahmad offered to write a history of that district. The District Magistrate placed all the district records at his disposal. Sayyid Ahmad collected enormous data for this work and examined a number of Mughal firmans. The work, however, could not see the light of the day because it was destroyed in the office of the Revenue Board at Agra in 1857.

Sir Henry Elliot got great help from Sayyid Ahmad in the preparation of *History of India* (later edited by Professor Dowson) though he has not acknowledged it. A letter of Sayyid Ahmad addressed to Sir Henry on September 7, 1847, and now preserved in the British Museum, shows that he was instrumental in securing for Elliot many classical histories of medieval India.

Works on Political Themes

Sayyid Ahmad's two works written soon after the upheaval of 1857—*Causes of the Indian Mutiny* and *History of the Revolt of Bijnor*—are contributions of great value to the political literature of the period. They reveal the author's strong sense of historical realities and his clear grasp of the current political problems and tendencies. In the former, a very sharp and penetrating analysis of the causes leading to the upheaval of 1857 has been made; the latter deals with the incidents of mutiny in the district of Bijnor, particularly with the role of Nawab Mahmud Khan in the struggle.

Contribution to Urdu Language and Literature

Sayyid Ahmad exercised tremendous influence on both the style and the content of Urdu literature. In fact, he ushered the dawn of a new era in the history of Urdu literature. He extricated Urdu prose from the meshes of verbose and ornate literary style and insisted on simple, direct and clear exposition of ideas. He used the Urdu language as a vehicle for the communication of serious ideas and thus extended the scope and content of writings in Urdu. He advised the Urdu scholars to adopt and assimilate what is best in other languages of the world. For the first time in the history of Urdu literature one finds references to the literatures and literary tendencies of Europe, particularly England. In his articles contributed to the *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, he introduced a large number of English writers and essayists to the Urdu-reading public.

Equally deep was his influence on the spirit and mechanics of the Urdu poetry. He exhorted the Urdu poets to turn their attention to natural poetry and "communicate in Urdu verse the ideas of the English poets".⁴ The *Muqaddama-i-Sh'ir-u-Sha'iri* of Hali owed its inspiration to these views of Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

It was due to the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad that Urdu poetry came to be used for social and moral—and even political—awakening of the masses. What is generally termed as *qaumi sha'iri* began under the influence of 'the Grand Old Man of Aligarh'. He exhorted poets who came to attend the annual sessions of the Muslim Educational Conference to write verses to awaken the people from their slumber and infuse in them a new spirit of enlightenment, culture and dedicated service to the nation. The poetry of Shibli, Hali, Nazir Ahmad and others was diverted into these channels by the great Sayyid. The *Musaddas* of Hali which

⁴ Letter to Muhammad Husain Azad, *Khutut-i Sir Sayyid* p. 22.

is a land-mark in the history of Urdu poetry was written at the instance of Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

Similarly Urdu journalism also owes a lot to Sayyid Ahmad Khan. It was in fact *Tazhib-ul-Akhlaq* which laid the foundation of journalism in Urdu language. Sayyid Ahmad stood for the highest traditions of journalism. He wrote to some of the Urdu editors that politeness, honesty and integrity should be the ideals of every journalist. Besides, he laid great emphasis on the freedom of expression and wanted the press to be an honest and truthful mouth-piece of public opinion. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was probably the first Urdu writer who advised the people to adopt type printing in preference to litho. He considered type printing necessary for the progress of Urdu language and journalism. He had a great artistic sense in printing and had an Urdu press of his own.

Sayyid Ahmad had, at one time, advocated the idea of an Urdu university as he thought that instruction in mother-tongue was more helpful in the development of young minds. Conscious of the fact that Urdu was a child in the family of languages, he sought to enrich it by getting as many English works translated into it as possible. But later on his views changed and he said that the Indians could never compete with the nations of the West if their knowledge remained confined to translations. In one of his letters from England, he wrote that the speed of progress was so swift in the West that before a book came out from the press its theories became out of date. Under such circumstances, Sayyid Ahmad Khan argued, the Indians would always lag behind others if they relied on translations and did not have recourse to original sources.

Sayyid Ahmad wanted to compile a comprehensive History of Urdu Literature containing a complete bibliography of books written in Urdu, but owing to other pressing demands on his time, he could not undertake this work. He

also wanted to compile an Urdu dictionary. The specimen portions published by him in the journal of the Scientific Society show that he had a very ambitious plan in mind. He, however, prepared an Urdu grammar in 1841. He was the first Urdu writer to give serious thought to the problem of punctuation in Urdu language and formulated elaborate rules in that regard. Some of the schemes of Sayyid Ahmad did not materialize in his life-time but their urgency was realized by the succeeding generations and one by one all schemes were taken up. The need of introducing some system of punctuation in Urdu is being felt by the scholars of the language and what Sayyid Ahmad felt necessary in the last quarter of the 19th century, is being regarded as an urgent necessity today.

In fact, Sayyid Ahmad Khan laid the foundation of what one may call 'the Aligarh School of Urdu Literature'. Nearly all the important Urdu writers of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries—Shibli, Hali, Nazir Ahmad, Zakaullah, Wahiduddin Salim, Abdul Halim Sharar, Dr. Maulvi Abdul Haq, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Hasrat Mohani, Muhammad Ali, etc.,—belong to this school. They continued the tradition of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in Urdu literature and applied it to the new and bold experiments that they made in that direction.

Works of Religious Nature

Another sphere in which Sayyid Ahmad's literary contributions are very significant relates to religion. He did not believe in religion being a static, traditional and irrational attitude of mind. To him religion was a dynamic force which could serve the needs of the time only if it was rationally understood and intelligently interpreted. Departing from the traditional line of Quranic commentaries, he attempted new interpretations to suit the needs of the time.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan considered a comparative study of religions as absolutely necessary for broadening one's

intellectual horizon. He was the first Indian who turned his attention to the Bible and wrote a commentary on it. A major portion of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's literary output deals with religious problems. The following works come under this category:

1. *Jila-ul-Qulub ba Zikr il Mahbub*: This brochure, compiled in 1842, deals with the life of the Prophet. The author has drawn his material mainly from Shah Waliullah's *Sarur-al-Mahzun* and Shaikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dihawi's *Madarij-al-Nabu-wat*. Maulana Muhammad Nurul Hasan revised and corrected it⁵

2. *Tuhfa-i-Hasan*: This is a translation of chapters X and XII of Shah Abdul Aziz's *Tuhfa-i-Asna-i-Ashariya*. It was completed in 1844.

3. *Kalamat-ul-Haqq*, a *risala* criticising the prevalent methods of initiating new entrants into the mystic discipline, was written in 1849.

4. *Rah-i-Sunnat dar rad-i-Bid 'at*: In this *risala*, written in 1859, Sayyid Ahmad Khan has criticised the people who deviate from the tradition (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet.

5. *Namiqa dar bayan mas'ala-i-Tassawwur-i-Shaikh*: This brochure, written in 1852, supports the Naqshbandi practice of visualizing the spiritual mentor as a means for spiritual progress.

6. An Urdu translation of the preliminary pages of Imam Ghazzali's *Kimiya-i-Sa'adat* was completed in 1863.

⁵ Great changes took place in the religious views of Sayyid Ahmad Khan subsequently. In a review written on this work by him in 1883 he expressed his disapproval of some of the views expressed by him earlier.

7. *Tabyin-ul-Kalam fi tafsir-al-Twat-wa'l Injil ala millat-al-Islam*: This book, written in 1861, is in the nature of a comparative study of the *Quran* and the Bible. Sayyid Ahmad thought that there was much which was identical in *Qur'an* and the Bible and wrote this book in order to bring out the elements of similarity between the two. He employed a Jew, Salim by name, at Ghazipur and learnt the Hebrew language from him. The presence of Maulana Enayat Rasul Chiryakoti, who was a great scholar of Arabic and Hebrew, further encouraged him to pursue his studies. A European scholar, who was engaged on Rs. 100/- per mensem, used to translate it into English simultaneously.

8. *Ta'm Ahl-i-Kitab*: In 1866, a query was received by Sayyid Ahmad asking him whether it was permissible to take food with Englishmen. Sayyid Ahmad replied in the affirmative, and wrote this *risala* in 1868 in order to explain his point of view.

9. *Khutbat-i-Ahmadiya* or *Lectures on Islam* was, in fact, a rejoinder to Sir William Muir's *Life of Mahomet*. Disturbed and pained at the wild allegations which Muir had made against the Prophet of Islam, Sayyid Ahmad Khan mobilized all his resources, in men, money and material, to refute his charges. His journey to England was largely inspired by a desire to consult books in the British Museum and other libraries in refutation of Muir's work. It was published in 1870.

10. *Tafsir-ul-Qur'an*: This commentary on the *Qur'an* was published in parts from 1876 to 1891. This is one of the most significant, yet most controversial works of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. The scholars of the traditional school, including those who agreed with Sayyid Ahmad Khan in other matters, opposed

his attempt to present a new interpretation of the *Qur'an*.⁶

11. *Al-Nazar fi-ba'z masa'il-i-Imam-al-Ghazzali*: This brochure was published in 1879. It contains comments, both appreciative and critical, on the following works of Imam Ghazzali: *Maznun ba ala ahl-i-hi*, *Maznun ba ala ghir ahl-i-hi* and *manquz min-al-zulal-al-Iqtisad fi-al-Islam wal-Zindaqa*.

12. *Tarqim fi qisa Ashab-al-Kahf wal-Raqim*: This is a commentary on that portion of the *Qur'an* which deals with the story of *Ashab-i-Kahf*. It was published in 1889.

13. *Izalat-ul-Ghain an Zul Qaranain*: This is a commentary on a portion of the *Qur'an* and was published in 1889.

14. *Risala Ibtal-i-Ghulami*: This *risala* deals with the question of slavery and was published in 1892.

15. *Al-Du'a wal istajaba*: This *risala* deals with the question of efficacy or otherwise of prayers. It was published in 1892.

16. *Tahrir fi Usul-al-Tafsir*: It deals with the principles of exegesis and was published in 1892. It explains all those principles which Sayyid Ahmad had followed in his commentary on the *Qur'an*.

17. *Tafsir-al-Samawat*: This *risala*, which originally appeared as an article in *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, was subsequently published in the form of a booklet in 1857. It deals with the interpretation of some of those

⁶ Maulana Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani, otherwise a great admirer of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's movement, questioned his competence to undertake this work. Review (on) *Hayat-i-Jaweed*, p. 11.

Quranic passages which appear to be in conformity with the Greek notions contained in *Majisti*.

Sayyid Ahmad was also keenly interested in the history of religious thought and very often published translations of new and interesting research articles on the subject. He wrote about Chaldea and the people of Noah, tried to establish the historical identity of Zul-Qaranain and enquired about the history of the idols of the Arabs. All these articles are characterized by extensive research and collection of data and a unique freshness of approach.

Sayyid Ahmad considered the popular belief about the *Mehdi* as baseless. He had thoroughly looked into the historical and other aspects of the problem.

Works on Scientific Subjects

Sayyid Ahmad had inherited from his maternal grandfather an interest in traditional scientific subjects. He wrote some books on technical subjects also. The *Tahsil fi jar-al-Saqil*, published in 1844, is an Urdu translation of Abu Ali's *risala Mayar-ul-'Uqul*. It deals with such themes as lightening the heavy and cutting the hard objects. The *Fawā'id-ul-Afkar fi A'mal-ul-Farjar*, published in 1846, is essentially based on some Persian manuscripts of his maternal grandfather. Sayyid Ahmad Khan added his own illustrations to make the discussion more lucid and intelligible. The other pamphlet, *Qaul-i-Matin dar Ibtal-i-Harkat-i-Zamin*, published in 1846, was written in defence of the old discarded theory about the stationary position of the earth. In subsequent years, Sayyid Ahmad rejected this view and accepted the current scientific theory about the movement of earth.

Works on Law

He wrote some books on law and translated some Acts into Urdu. The following works have reached us:

- (1) *Intikhab-al-Akhwain* published in 1846.
- (2) Urdu translation of all cases decided between 1810—1872 in three volumes.
- (3) Acts No. 10, 14 and 16.

Apart from these books and brochures, Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote innumerable articles on different subjects: legal, social, political, literary, etc. A collection of all these articles would run into several volumes.

His own contributions apart, Sayyid Ahmad also persuaded others to write on important religious, historical and literary subjects. He started a new series, known as the 'Al Series' and *Al-Faruq*, *Al-Mamun*, *Al-Bara-maka*, *Al-Ghazzali*, *Al-Jiyyah*, etc.. are really parts of that series.

CHAPTER VIII

AS A RELIGIOUS THINKER

Sayyid Ahmad had a very dynamic and enlightened conception of religion. He interpreted it in terms of human service and identified it with those moral and spiritual values which give a forward pull to humanity and ensure its moral well-being. He looked down upon fanaticism and exclusiveness as negation of the true spirit of religion and advocated a broad, tolerant and enlightened approach in all religious matters. He was opposed to the acceptance of religion as a traditional reality. Religion should have a value in terms of current human experience and should help human society in its onward march, he used to say. Further he believed that it was necessary to interpret religion according to the spirit of every age. A religion which did not move with the times failed to serve the needs of society and became a fossil. It was necessary, therefore, to develop an *'ilm-i-Kalam* (scholasticism) according to the requirements of every age.

Another striking feature of the Sayyid's religious thought, which, according to Dr. Baljon may be considered "the axiom of his theology" was the adage: "The Work of God (Nature and its fixed laws) is identical with the Word of God (*Qur'an*)". This led him to attempt reconciliation between the scientific theories of his age and the principles of Islam. In an age of conflict between religion and science such an effort had a significance of its own, but as years rolled on, the domains of science and religion became so distinctly bifurcated that no religious thinker could even think of stretching the Scriptures to support or refute the

contemporary scientific theories. But the second approach was essentially an out-growth of the first. In Sayyid Ahmad's days religion needed a reconciliation with science otherwise it stood in danger of being liquidated by the new scientific trends of the age. In the history of Indo-Muslim religious thought Maulana Abul Kalam Azad represents the second approach in his *Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an* but as he has himself confessed in his autobiography, he was once a voracious reader of Sayyid Ahmad's exegetical studies. His approach thus grew out of, or in a way represents a reaction against, the approach of Sayyid Ahmad.

Sayyid Ahmad's religious thought and activity was conditioned by two factors: the activities of the Christian missionaries in India and the naturalistic trends of thought in the West. He appeared as a Muslim Scholastic to meet the first and as a Muslim Rationalist to meet the second situation.

The activities of the Christian missionaries in India were directed towards converting the Indians to Christianity and shaking their belief in their cardinal principles of faith. Sayyid Ahmad Khan reacted sharply to this and put up a determined struggle against it. In *Causes of the Indian Revolt*, he indignantly refers to the activities of Christian missionaries in India. His remarks deserve to be quoted in full:

"There is not the smallest doubt that all men, whether ignorant or well-informed, whether high or low, felt a firm conviction that the English Government was bent on interfering with their religion, and with their old-established customs. They believed that the Government intended to force the Christian religion and foreign customs upon Hindu and Mussalman alike. This was the chief among the secondary causes of the rebellion. It was believed by every one that the Government was slowly but surely developing its

plans. Every step, it was thought, was being taken with the most extreme caution. Hence it is that men said that the Government does not speak of proselytising Mohammedans summarily and by force; but it will throw off the veil as it feels itself stronger, and will act with greater decision. Events increased and strengthened this conviction. Men never thought that our Government would openly compel them to change their religion. The idea was, that indirect steps would be taken. It was supposed that Government would, by making the people devoid of a knowledge of their own faith, work on the cupidity and poverty of its subjects, and, on condition of their abjuring their faith, offer them employment in its own service.

In the year 1837, the year of the great drought, the step which was taken of rearing orphans in the principles of the Christian faith was looked upon throughout the North-West Provinces as an example of the schemes of Government. It was supposed that when Government had similarly brought all Hindustanees to a pitch of ignorance and poverty, it would convert them to its own creed. The Hindustanees used to feel an increasing dismay at the annexation of each successive country by the Honourable East India Company.

In the first days of British rule in Hindustan, there used to be less talk than at present on the subject of religion. It has been commonly believed that the Government appointed missionaries and maintained them at its own cost. It has been supposed that the Government, and the officers of Government throughout the country, were in the habit of giving large sums of money to these missionaries, with the intention of covering their expenses, enabling them to distribute books, and in every way aiding them. Many

covenanted officers and many military men have been in the habit of talking to their subordinates about religion; some of them would bid their servants come to their houses and listen to the preaching of missionaries, and thus it happened that in the course of time no man felt sure that his creed would last even his own lifetime. The missionaries, moreover, introduced a new system of preaching. They took to printing and circulating controversial tracts, in the shape of questions and answers. Men of a different faith were spoken of in those tracts in a most offensive and irritating way. In Hindustan, these things have always been managed very differently. Every man in this country preaches and explains his views in his own mosque or his own house. If any one wishes to listen to him, he can go to the mosque or house and hear what he has to say. But the missionaries' plan was exactly the opposite. They used to attend places of public resort—markets, for instance, and fairs, where men of different creeds were collected together—and used to begin preaching there. It was only from fear of the authorities that no one bade them be off about their business. In some districts the missionaries were actually attended by policemen from the station. And then the missionaries did not confine themselves to explaining the doctrines of their own books. In violent and unmeasured language they attacked the followers and the holy places of other creeds, annoying and insulting beyond expression the feelings of those who listened to them. In this way, too the seeds of discontent were sown deep in the hearts of the people.

Then missionary schools were started in which the principles of the Christian faith were taught. Men said it was by the order of the Government. In some districts covenanted officers of high position and of

great influence used to visit the schools and encourage the people to attend them; examinations were held in books which taught the tenets of the Christian religion. Lads who attended the schools used to be asked such questions as the following, "Who is your God?" "Who is your Redeemer?" and these questions they were obliged to answer agreeably to the Christian belief—prizes being given accordingly. This again added to the prevailing ill-will. But it may be said with some justice, "If the people were not satisfied with this course of education, why did they let their children go to the schools?" The fact is, that we have here no question of like or dislike. On the contrary, we must account for this by the painfully degraded and ignorant state of the people. They believed that if their children were entered at the schools, they might have employment given them by Government, and be enabled to find some means of subsistence. Hence they put up with a state of affairs in reality disagreeable enough to them. But it must not be thought that they ever liked those schools.

When the village schools were established, the general belief was that they were instituted solely with the view of teaching the doctrines of Jesus. The pergunnah visitors and deputy inspectors who used to go from village to village and town to town advising the people to enter their children at these schools, got the nickname of native clergymen. When the pergunnah visitor or deputy inspector entered any village, the people used to say that the native clergyman had come. Their sole idea was, that these were Christian schools, established with the view of converting them. Well-informed men, although they did not credit this, saw nevertheless that in these schools nothing but Urdu was taught. They were afraid that boys while reading only Urdu would forget

the tenets of their own faith, and that they would thus drift into Christianity. They believed, also, that the Government wished such books as bore upon the doctrines of the prevalent religions of Hindustan to fall into entire disuse. This was to be done with the view of ensuring the spread of Christianity. In many of the eastern districts of Hindustan where these schools were established boys were enrolled there by compulsion, and by compulsion only. It was currently reported that all this was in pursuance of the orders of the Government."¹

This shows how deeply Sayyid Ahmad was perturbed about the activities of the missionaries and how he considered public resentment created by this religious interference as a contributory cause for the upheaval of 1857.

The Christian missionaries were very active during the famine of 1860. They started converting the destitute children to Christianity. When Sayyid Ahmad took over charge of the relief centre at Moradabad, he obtained a commitment from the Collector that the orphans would not be handed over to the missionaries. This promise was not kept subsequently and Sayyid Ahmad Khan was deeply distressed at this disregard of the plighted word. His agony was, however, increased by the attitude of some Indians who supported the Collector in his design as they lacked courage to oppose him.

The attacks of the missionary writers on Islam, which were intended to shake the faith of the younger generation of Muslims in their religion, were another source of great concern for Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Sir William Muir wrote *Life of Mahomet* in four volumes at the instance of

¹ *Causes of the Indian Revolt*, as translated by Graham, pp. 28—31.

Dr. Pfandar² who was the soul of the Christian missionary activities in India. When this book reached India people began its study with an open mind. But when they discovered that the author had taken the pen with a particular bias, they were not surprised to find innumerable distortions and falsehoods in it and, as was natural under the circumstances, there was a feeling of repulsion and disgust. But it had an entirely different effect on those educated young men who were ignorant of their own religious literature. "If what Muir has written is a distortion and perversion of truth, they asked, what is the truth?" And this class of "educated young men" was the one in the creation of which Sayyid Ahmad had played a vital role. He, therefore, felt that it was his moral duty to save these young men from turning away from Islam. After hard and strenuous labour in India and England, he produced *Al-Khutbat-al-Ahmadiya (Lectures on Islam)* in which he systematically demolished the whole structure of Muir's insinuations. "Its ten chapters," he wrote to Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, "would bring to me (on the Day of Judgement) the reward of ten Hajj pilgrimages."³ The book served the purpose with which it was written. Sayyid Ahmad Khan received a number of letters from young men saying that but for this book they would have gone over to Christianity. He kept these letters with great care in his box and used to say that on the Day of Judgement these letters would bring great reward to him.

Sayyid Ahmad was justly proud of this book. "No Muslim has so far written a book on the life of the Prophet in English," he wrote in a letter. The labour that he put in the preparation of this work was simply astonishing. He gave up

² Dr. Pfandar was a very well-known Christian missionary. He worked with great success in Iran and India. His book *Mizan-ul-Haqq* created great commotion amongst the Muslims. Maulvi Rahmat Ali of Kerana outwitted him completely in a debate at Agra.

³ *Khutut-i Sir Sayyid*, p. 43. The book contained twelve chapters.

social visits, reduced his diet and spent sleepless nights reading old manuscripts and records. After months of patient and sustained mental activity, he produced this monumental work.

The *Khutbat-i-Ahmadiya* is not merely a critique of or a rejoinder to the theories propounded by Sir William Muir. It embodies an attempt to re-interpret in a rational and convincing manner many of the institutions and ideas of Islam in the light of the trends and tendencies of the 19th century.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan believed that the old concepts about the purpose and significance of religion in life had to be re-valued and re-stated and the method of its study had to be completely revolutionized. He found the contemporary Muslim religious thought confronted with the same complex situation which the Mussalmans of the early middle ages had faced when the Greek philosophy had become popular among the Muslims. "Today we are," wrote Sayyid Ahmad, "as before, in need of a modern *'ilm-i-Kalam*, by which we should refute the doctrines of modern science and undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with the articles of Islamic faith. When I am endeavouring to introduce these sciences among the Muslims, then it is my duty to defend the religion of Islam and to reveal its original bright face."⁴

The pivotal point in Sayyid Ahmad's *'ilm-i-Kalam* was that a rational approach in all religious matters was absolutely necessary. As a coin is tested on a counter so also religion should be tested on the counter of reason. Blind acceptance of or adherence to faith was inconsistent with the spirit of the age. With this aim in view he tried to re-interpret many Muslim beliefs and concepts. He put a liberal and progressive interpretation on many popular concepts and

⁴ *Lectures*, p. 276.

discarded a 'super-natural' or 'traditional' approach to religion as something which retarded the progress of man and society. This approach of Sayyid Ahmad towards religion was criticised by the orthodox school of Deobund. Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi appreciated his concern for the welfare of the people but strongly disapproved of his religious ideas.⁵ Sayyid Ahmad, on his part, wanted to have the cooperation and good-will of the Deobund school to the maximum. He secured the services of Maulana 'Ab-dullah, son-in-law of Maulana Muhammad Qasim, for the theology section of the M.A.O. College⁶ and publicly declared that he had no intention of imposing his religious views on the college.

Sayyid Ahmad believed in *ijtihad* (re-interpretation of religious concepts according to the needs of the time) as a necessary instrument for the realization of the real objectives of religion. It was *ijtihad*, he said, which infused a dynamic spirit in religion and made it responsive to new situations and requirements of time. In a letter, he wrote to Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk:

"Listen dear brother! This is not the time that I should conceal my conscience from you. I tell you frankly that if people will not give up blind adherence (*taqlid*) and will not search out that particular light which can be had from the *Qur'an* and the reliable traditions of the Prophet and will not compare (? reconcile) religion with modern sciences the religion

⁵ It may, however, be pointed out that Sayyid Ahmad Khan had profound respect for the piety and scholarship of Maulana Muhammad Qasim and wrote a very touching obituary note on his death.

⁶ The type of religious instruction Sayyid Ahmad wanted to be given to the students may be gleaned from a letter addressed to Hafiz Said Ahmad (*Khutut-i- Sir Sayyid*, p. 173). "The hearts of the Muslim students should be filled with goodness, love and morality, not fanaticism and rigidity," he wrote.

of Islam would disappear from India. This anxiety for the well-being of Islam has forced me to carry on all these researches and I do not care for the traditional rut. Otherwise you know well that in my view, to remain a Muslim and to be entitled for Paradise it is enough to follow Maulvi Habbu, not to speak of the great jurists of Islam."⁷

Sayyid Ahmad thought that much of the confusion in Muslim religious thinking was due to the fact that no direct recourse was made to the *Qur'an*. Instead, the superstructure of commentaries, *ahadis*, etc., which had grown round it, absorbed the whole attention. He emphasized that the only trustworthy and reliable basis for understanding Islam was the *Qur'an*.

With regard to the *ahadis* (Traditions of the Prophet) his view was that all those *ahadis* which contradicted the *Qur'an*, or were against reason or were opposed to human experience, should be rejected. Besides, he made a clear distinction between *ahadis* which contained purely religious injunctions and those which dealt with worldly affairs. The former had to be accepted while the latter were not obligatory or binding as they were relevant in a particular context and related to a particular society at a particular period of time. They were not applicable under modern conditions. He did not agree with those jurists who had given *ahadis* final and decisive role in deciding matters of legal import.

With these views Sayyid Ahmad Khan laid the foundations of a new and progressive thought in Islam. In his exegesis of the *Qur'an*, his main aim seemed to be a rational interpretation of all Islamic laws and to extricate the Muslim mind from narrow and parochial adherence to old thought and beliefs. "The new liberalizing theology,"

⁷ Khutut-i Sir Sayyid, p. 55.

remarks Gibb, "that followed from Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's rationalist approach to Islam, brought with it a revaluation of the traditional social ethics of the Muslim community. The latter was probably one of its strongest attractions for the growing body of Muslim intellectuals, who were becoming actually aware of the social evils linked with such practices as slavery and unregulated polygamy and divorce. In this respect, indeed, the influence of his school has extended far beyond the boundaries of Indian Islam through their new presentation, partly apologetic but also implicitly reformist, of Muslim practice and social doctrine."⁸

If any single Indian scholar exercised the deepest influence on the religious thought of Sayyid Ahmad, it was Shah Waliullah (1703-1761) whose works he seems to have read with great care and whom he very frequently quotes in support of his religious views. What brought the Sayyid close to Shah Waliullah's thought was the latter's emphasis on fresh interpretation of religion according to the needs of the time. Shah Waliullah was a mystic and his spiritual experiences determined his evaluation of problems and personalities at many places. This was not liked by Sayyid Ahmad. Some of the controversial matters on which he accepted and adopted Shah Waliullah's views indicate the nature and extent of Shah Waliullah's influence on his religious thinking.

(1) On the question of the corrupting of Christian Scriptures, it is generally held by the Muslim theologians that the Jews and the Christians made textual changes in their Scriptures in order to justify their actions on different occasions. Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not agree with this view. He writes in his commentary on the Bible:

"It must be considered, that the sacred Scriptures

⁸ Mohammedanism, p. 182.

may be corrupted in various ways:

First, by adding words or phrases which were not there originally;

Secondly, by striking out existing words or phrases;

Thirdly, by the substitution of other words, differing from those struck out;

Fourthly, by making verbal changes while reading, so as to convey to the ear words different from what were written;

Fifthly, by reading only some passages, and omitting others;

Sixthly, by instructing the people in a manner contrary to God's teaching in His holy word and yet making them believe that this instruction is the true word;

Seventhly, by adopting an improper meaning of certain words of ambiguous or equivocal interpretation. which does not suit the sense intended; and

Eighthly, by misinterpreting those passages which are mysterious and allegorical."⁹

He held that there could not be corruptions of the first three types in the Bible. In support of his point of view, he cited Shah Waliullah who remarks in his *Fauz-ul-Kabir* that he thinks that in "paraphrases and commentaries on books of the Old Testament, people were in the habit of corrupting the sense of certain passages of Scriptures, but that the original text was not tampered with."¹⁰

⁹ The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible, Vol. I pp. 65-66.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 70.

2. On the question of determining the relative value and authenticity of the various collections of *ahadis*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan follows Shah Waliullah and places the compilations of Malik, Bukhari and Muslim in the first category.

3. On the question of the legal import of *ahadis*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan follows Shah Waliullah. He classifies *ahadis* on the basis of their contents and holds that those which have a specific reference to the time and circumstances of the Arab society of those days have absolutely no bearing on the problems of our society. But religious matters have a significance and validity which cannot be bound down by time or space.

4. He did not believe in miracles happening against the laws of nature. "He accepts miracles if they are defined as strange and extraordinary events which obey the laws of causation and the uniformity of Nature and thinks that Waliullah also accepts only this kind of miracles."¹¹

5. He was impressed by Shah Waliullah's ideas on evolution also.

Amongst other Islamic thinkers whom Sayyid Ahmad frequently refers, one may mention the names of Imam Ghazzali, Ibn Rushd and some Mu'tazalite scholars.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan wrote a commentary on the *Qur'an*. His decision to write a commentary was not due to any exuberance of religious knowledge but was inspired by a desire to create effective bulwarks against the permeation of ideas which, he thought, would shake faith in the validity of the principles of Islam.

He also wrote a commentary on the Bible. This was the first significant attempt at a comparative study of religions in India in the 19th century. In the first discourse of *Tabyin-*

¹¹ Dar, Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, p. 187.

ul-Kalam he deals with "the necessity of coming of Prophets to save mankind" and develops, on the basis of Quranic references, the thesis that every nation and country has been blessed with the prophets and all prophets had the same *din*. He then goes into the authenticity and value of Pentateuch, Psalms, Gospels and other books of the Prophets for the Mussalmans.

Thus, in the field of religious thought Sayyid Ahmad's greatest contribution was that he laid the foundation of a new '*Ilm-i-Kalam*' (scholasticism) and initiated comparative religious studies.

CHAPTER IX

POLITICAL THOUGHT AND ACTIVITIES

Sayyid Ahmad's political thought was the outcome of his political experience and was based on a careful and realistic appraisal of the contemporary Indian life and its problems. He belonged to a family which had centuries-old contact with the Mughal court.

He decided to sever his service relations with the Mughals because the emperor, *roi faineant* as he was, was no longer in a position to maintain his servants. With this painful realization, Sayyid Ahmad Khan decided to join the service of the East India Company. But this decision was taken purely on economic considerations, as at this stage he had hardly any political views.

It was the Revolt of 1857 which shook up his whole being and provoked political reactions in him. He began to brood over the causes and consequences of rebellions and revolutions.

In a brochure, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, he made a thorough study of the problem from all possible angles—political, religious, economic and military. In fact this brochure was not only his first work of a political nature, but "the first political pamphlet written by an Indian".¹

The following factors contributed to the formulation of his political ideas:

¹ Prof. H. K. Sherwani, Presidential Address, Indian Political Science Association, 1952, p. 3.

(1) The failure of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid's movement (1831) to regain political power made it clear to him that without knowledge of modern scientific developments, which had revolutionized every sphere of human life and thought, no attempt at political regeneration could fructify.

(2) The miserable plight of the Indian people after 1857 convinced him that unless the people moved with the times and adopted Western science and learning, they could not get rid of their backwardness, ignorance and inertia.

(3) Since the Indians did not possess the requisite resources, organization, discipline and above all the determination to wrest power through force, he was convinced of the utter futility of the use of force for regaining political power and prestige.

In a speech, he said: "The people of Ireland are carrying on their struggle for independence. Where are the men who can launch such a struggle in India?"

(4) Sayyid Ahmad thought that education was more urgently required than political freedom. Without education, political freedom, even if obtained, could not be retained; but education could be instrumental in winning back the lost political power and prestige.

It was this analysis which determined Sayyid Ahmad's political role in the decades that followed. Whatever changes took place subsequently in his political approach were due to his experience.

In 1857, he had asked the British Government for Indian representation in the councils, but his experience of the role of the Indians in the Famine Relief Committees of 1860, the District Education Committees of 1866, the Viceroy's Council, the Education Commission, etc., revealed to him

the painful fact that without proper education Indian representation was bound to be not only ineffective but injurious.

On one occasion, he remarked with irritation that Indian representatives sit like "wax figures at the Madam Tussaud's Gallery".

Aftermath of 1857

The aftermath of 1857 was more severe for the Muslims than for the Hindus.² The British Government looked upon them as the real 'rebels' and dealt with them in a most ruthless manner, determined to cut them root and branch and to reduce them to a position of complete political and economic servility. They did not look upon Muslim opposition to their authority in its limited Indian context, but considered it in the wider context of Islamic world history in which the historic conflict between the Crescent and the Cross also came in to prejudice the situation.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan clearly realized that under the circumstances the slightest indication of opposition on the part of the Muslims— ignorant, poverty-stricken and disorganized as they were—would spell ruin. Political sagacity demanded an all-out effort to bring about a change in the British attitude towards the Muslims. In order to show that the Muslim community was basically loyal to the British, he started a journal *The Loyal Muhammadans of India*, which contained accounts of those Muslims who had supported the British Government in 1857.

To remove from the British mind suspicions about the Muslim attitude towards Christianity, he traced the story of

² "The Muslim," writes Jawaharlal Nehru, "were considered more aggressive and militant, and therefore, the heavy hands of the British fell more on the Muslims than on the Hindus." *Autobiography*, p. 458.

cordial relations between Islam and Christianity from the days of the Prophet when some early Arab Muslims who were persecuted by the non-Muslims of Arabia had sought shelter with a Christian ruler of Ethiopia. "No religion upon earth is more friendly to Christianity than Islam," he declared in *Essay on the Question Whether Islam Has Been Beneficial or Injurious to Human Society in General and to the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations*. In *Tabyin-ul-Kalam* he tried to record the common points between the *Qur'an* and the Bible. The task was a stupendous one — he had to cut through and evolve a thesis undeterred by the long and inconvenient incidents of the Crusades and also the conflict between the Christian powers and the Turks in his own day.

Another source of apprehension for the British was the Muslim concept of *jihad* with which the entire political atmosphere was filled from the very beginning of the 19th century. From Balakot, near Peshawar, to Bahadurpur in Bengal agitated religious thought was reeling round the obligation of waging *jihad*. The *fatwa* of Shah 'Abdul 'Aziz and the activities of the followers of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, referred to as Wahhabis by the English writers, were enough to create fear and suspicions in British mind about the Muslims. Sayyid Ahmad Khan used all the force of his persuasive talent as well as his knowledge of Muslim law, to dispel this fear by proving that *jihad* was not justified against the British power in India. He tried to exonerate the Wahhabis also of all the charges levelled against them in this respect. He argued that when Bakht Khan rose up against the British in 1857, he requested the *maulvis* to issue a *fatwa* justifying *jihad* against the British, but they declined to issue such a religious decree. This meant, argued Sayyid Ahmad, that "true Wahhabism was not inimical to the British Government". In fact Sayyid Ahmad Khan's own intellectual development, despite his pro-British role in 1857, had taken place under the influence of that group of

Delhi *'ulama* which came to be known as Wahhabis. His profound respect and reverence for Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, Shah Isma'il and others, is evident from the accounts of these saints in the first edition of *Asar-us-Sanadid* which appeared in 1847.³ He had heard the lectures of Shah Isma'il Shahid and, as is clear from his early literary works, had definitely come under his influence. He asserted that to implicate the Muslims as a community in any anti-British activity was "monstrous in the extreme". Regarding the convictions of the Wahhabis, he remarked: "A Wahhabi is simply a pure worshipper—a puritan of Islam, a follower of the uncontaminated faith of the Prophet. To represent him as invariably a secret conspirator against constituted authority—a worker in darkness, a preacher of sedition—is a libel." Sayyid Ahmad presented Wahhabism purely as a religious movement, stripped of all its political connotation—an approach which was not free from serious historical inconsistencies but he successfully sustained his point of view in his articles and reviews.

Despite his attempt to support the British Government and give unreserved co-operation to it, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not devoid of progressive political thought. In fact, he was, in certain respects, a pioneer in the field of progressive political thought in India. His pamphlet *The Causes of the Indian Revolt* reveals a politically conscious personality. "When he started the weekly journal of the Scientific Society, he inscribed the following motto on it:

"Liberty of the Press is a prominent duty of the Government and a natural right of the subjects."

In *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, Sayyid Ahmad gives a careful and thought-provoking exposition of the principles

³ When the second edition of the *Asar-us-Sanadid* appeared after 1857, Sayyid Ahmad Khan dropped out the entire chapter dealing with the eminent figures of Delhi.

of revolution. "Universal rebellion might arise," he remarks, "from the universal grounds, from discontent or from streams deriving from many different sources but finally merging in one widespreading turbulent water." Elaborating his point further, he remarks, that a very important cause of the conflagration of 1857 was the "non-representation of Indians in the Governor-General's Legislative Council". He insisted that it was in the interest of the Government that "people should have a voice in its councils". "It is from the voice of the people," he continued, "that Government can learn whether its projects are likely to be well received. The voice of the people can alone nip errors in the bud and warn us of dangers before they burst upon and destroy us. The security of a Government, it will be remembered, is founded on its knowledge of the character of the governed as well as on its careful observance of their rights and privileges." Recalling these observations of Sayyid Ahmad, Lala Lajpat Rai remarked in 1888, "These are noble words, nobly spoken, words of sterling honesty and independence of spirit."⁴

Sayyid Ahmad went further in his analysis of "the evils which resulted to India from the non-admission of natives into the Legislative Council of India" and remarked :

"Government could never know the inadvisability of the laws and regulations which it passed. It could never hear as it ought to have heard the voice of the people on such a subject. The people had no means of protesting against what they might feel to be a foolish measure, or giving public expression to their own wishes. But the greatest mischief lay in this, that the people misunderstood the views and the intentions of Government. They misapprehended every act, and whatever law was passed was misconstrued by men

⁴ Open Letters, p. 3.

who had no share in the framing of it, and hence no means of judging its spirit. At length the Hindustanees fell into the habit of thinking that all the laws were passed with a view to degrade and ruin them, and to deprive them and their fellows of their religion. Such acts, as were repugnant to native customs and character, whether in themselves good or bad, increased this suspicion. At last came the time when all men looked upon the English Government as slow poison, a rope of sand, a treacherous flame of fire. They learned to think that if today they escaped from the hands of Government, tomorrow they would fall into them; or that even if they escaped on the morrow, the third day would see their ruin. There was no man to reason with them, no one to point out to them the absurdity of such ideas.....

"I do not wish to enter into the question as to how the ignorant and uneducated natives of Hindustan could be allowed a share in the deliberations of the Legislative Council, or as to how they should be selected to form an assembly like the English Parliament. These are knotty points. All I wish to prove here is, that such a step is not only advisable, but absolutely necessary, and that the disturbances are due to the neglect of such a measure."

He then drew the attention of the Government to the need of developing cordial relations with the people and giving due regard to them.

"The people and the Government I may liken to a tree, the latter being the root, and the former the growth of that root. As the root is, so will the tree be. Friendship, intercourse and sympathy are therefore not wholly dependent for their existence on the givers and recipients being of the same religion, race or country.....Truth compels me to state that

Government has not cultivated the friendship of the people, as was its duty to do.....One great source of the stability of a Government is undoubtedly the treating of its subjects with honour and thus gaining their affections."

While Sayyid Ahmad exhorted the Government to respect the feelings of the people, he also reminded them of their duty. He asked the people to be courageous and place their grievances before the Government. In a speech at Aligarh, on May 10, 1866, he said: "Can you expect its (British Parliament) members to take a deep interest in your affairs, if you do not lay your affairs before them?.....Believe me that your moral cowardice is wrong. You know that you are in the habit of inveighing against various acts of Government in your own homes and amongst your own families, and that you, in the course of your visits to European gentlemen, represent yourselves as quite satisfied with the justice and wisdom of these very acts. Such a state of affairs is inimical to the well-being of the country. Far better would it be for India were her people to speak out openly and honestly their opinions as to the justice, or otherwise, of the acts of Government."⁵ Considered in the broad perspective of conditions then prevailing in the country, such ideas appear not only progressive but almost revolutionary.

Opposes Increase in Governor-General's Powers

In 1869, when a Bill was placed before the British Parliament for increasing the powers of the Governor-General of India, Sayyid Ahmad wrote to Nawab Moh-sin-ul-Mulk from London: "In fact (now) India has become slave and this Bill is extremely detrimental to the Indians. If a law like this would have been promulgated in England, the

⁵ The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Graham London, 1909, p. 61.

whole people would have demanded its abrogation."⁶

As a Member of the Viceroy's Council

In 1878, Lord Lytton nominated Sayyid Ahmad as a member of the Viceroy's Council for a period of two years. He was reappointed for a further term of two years by Lord Ripon. During his tenure of office, he proved to be a very vocal member of the Council and took keen interest in all matters of public welfare. His speeches on the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Bill and on the Compulsory Vaccination Bill were characterized by a rare clarity of views, sharp analysis of facts and a unique force of arguments. He was instrumental in getting a bill about the Qazis passed by the Council. The Bill for Compulsory Vaccination was drafted by him. Introducing it, he remarked:

"My Lord! I wish to mention the principles which have been prominent in my mind in framing the bill. I have endeavoured to make its provisions as simple as possible, to provide facilities for their being carried out, to avoid everything likely to give offence to the feelings of the people, and lastly, to encourage, as far as possible, the co-operation of native gentlemen in giving effect to the provisions of the proposed law. No one can hold stronger views than I do, that no measure relating to the welfare of the public should be adopted without due regard to the feelings of those to whom the measure relates."

The last sentence gives a good idea of the way in which he worked during his tenure of office as a member of the Viceroy's Council. But he was opposed to the introduction of the principle of election in the various local bodies. In one of his later speeches, he said:

⁶ Khatut-i-Sir Sayyid, p. 40.

"In the time of Lord Ripon I happened to be a member of the Council. Lord Ripon had a very good heart and kind disposition and every qualification for a Governor. But, unfortunately, his hand was weak. His ideas were radical. At that time, the Local Board and Municipality Bills were brought forward, and the intention of them was that everybody should be appointed by election. Gentlemen; I am not a conservative: I am a great liberal. But to forget the capacity of one's nation is not a sign of wisdom. The only person who was opposed to the system of election was myself. If I am not bragging too much. I may, I think, say that it was on account of my speech that Lord Ripon changed his opinion and made one-third of the members appointed and two-thirds elected."

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's work in the Council was characterized by a deep and genuine concern for the welfare of all Indians, irrespective of caste, colour or creed. Presenting an address to him in 1884 on behalf of the Indian Association of Lahore, Dayal Singh, the President of the Association, said:

"Your highly useful career in the Legislative Council of India can only be touched upon here. Your impartial care for all classes, your manly and faithful representation of national views and your vigilant regard for national interests, while acting in that body, deserve the warmest acknowledgements from us and our countrymen."

Replying to this address, he said:

"You have also alluded, in your address, to my services in the Legislative Council during the period when I have had the honour of being a member of the Council. I cannot help saying that I feel that a man

like myself was not worthy of having a seat in the Legislative Council of India, and of holding the great responsibility attached to that seat. I was myself aware of the difficulties that stood in my way; nevertheless, it was my earnest and sincere desire that I should faithfully serve my country and my nation.

By the word nation, I mean both Hindus and Mahomedans. This is the way in which I define the word nation. In my opinion, it matters not whatever be their religious belief, because we cannot see anything of it; but what we see is that all of us, whether Hindus or Mahomedans, live on one soil, are governed by one and the same ruler, have the same sources of our advantage, and equally share the hardships of a famine. These are the various grounds on which I designate both the communities that inhabit India by the expression Hindu nation; and while a member of the Legislative Council I had at heart the prosperity of this very nation."

Nothing reveals more clearly the nature and spirit of his work in the Council than the speech quoted above.

As a Member of the Public Service Commission

In 1887, Lord Dufferin appointed him as a member of the Public Service Commission. In that capacity he fought for the retention of the Statutory Civil Service whereby the Indians might aspire to rise to the highest posts without being appointed by the Civil Service Commission in England.

Opposition to Pan-Islamic Movement

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's political ideas were later conditioned by the rise of the Pan-Islamic movement of Maulana Jamaluddin Afghani in the Muslim world and the establishment of the Indian National Congress in India. The

first necessitated a decision regarding the role of the Indian Muslims in the politics of the Muslim world and the second demanded a determination of Muslim attitude towards the political movements in India. Since the conditions in India were entirely different from those prevailing in other parts of the Muslim world, where Jamaluddin Afghani had organized his movement, Sayyid Ahmad Khan completely rejected the idea of internationalization of Muslim politics. He considered such an approach ill-conceived and impolitic. He firmly combated the claim of Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey to be the Khalifa of the Indian Muslims. Further, any involvement in international politics at that time was not possible without coming into direct conflict with the British in India. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's apathy towards the Pan-Islamic movement brought forth bitter condemnation from Jamaluddin Afghani who used all sorts of abusive invectives against him.

Opposition to the Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and, in the beginning, the attitude of the British Government was one of indulgence towards the organization. Lord Dufferin himself remarked that the creation of a "Loyal Opposition" which could function as a "safety valve" was absolutely necessary.⁷ To start with, Sayyid Ahmad Khan did not express any views about the Indian National Congress, but later on he entered the field as one of its critics. He explained his attitude towards the Congress in his famous Lucknow Address (December 28, 1888). He said:

"Gentlemen; I am not given to speaking on politics, and I do not recollect having ever previously given a political lecture. My attention has always been directed towards the education of my brother

⁷ *Inside Asia*, Gunther, p. 447.

Mahomedans; for from education I anticipate benefit for my people, for Hindustan, and for the Government. But at the present time circumstances have arisen which make it necessary for me, I think, to tell my brother Musalmans clearly what my opinions are."⁸

Since Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself was the first to advocate the representation of Indians in the councils, it came as a shock and surprise to many when all of a sudden he started opposing the idea of Indian representation in councils. Some Hindus and Muslims supported his point of view; others opposed it vehemently. Maulvi Sharaf-ul-Haqq wrote a *risala Kalam Mufid-al-Anam* and criticised his Lucknow speech and his views about the Congress demands. In a series of open letters, Lala Lajpat Rai gave expression to his feelings of grief and surprise at the change in the attitude of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Some of the passages of these letters are very significant. He wrote:

"From childhood, I was taught to respect the opinions and the teachings of the white-bearded Syed of Aligarh. Your *Social Reformer* was constantly read to me by my fond father, who looked upon you as no less than a prophet of the nineteenth century. Your writings in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, and your speeches in Council and other public meetings, were constantly studied by me and preserved as a sacred trust by my revered father..... It is strange then that I have been astonished to read what you now speak and write about the National Congress..... Is it not a sad spectacle to see men whose days are numbered, whose feet are almost in the grave, trying to root out all the trees planted with their own hand?"

⁸ Sir Syed Ahmad Khan on the Mahomedans and the National Congress, Allahabad, 1888, p. 2.

That Sayyid Ahmad Khan's political ideas in 1888 were poles apart from what he had advocated during the three preceding decades is as true as it is surprising. His arguments for this change were:

(1) An essential requisite for the success of democratic processes is an equal level of educational attainment by all people living in a country. In India there is no such equality and hence any conferment of democratic privileges would mean exclusive enjoyment by a few.

(2) Introduction of competitive examination in India, as demanded by the Indian National Congress, would mean permanent subjugation of the backward communities by the more advanced communities.

He thought that the grant of democratic rights was premature and would create unnecessary political tussle in the country. Since the Bengalis alone were educationally advanced, they would monopolize all political power and "the Hindus..... the brave Rajputs, the stalwart Marathas and other martial races will be dissatisfied with the Government. Violence will prevail and peace would disappear from the country". His advice to the Muslims was to eschew politics and concentrate all their energies on education and to strive to come up to the level of other communities in learning and scientific achievements. There were certain Hindu leaders also who shared the views of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and opposed the Congress. Some of them even approached him to lead the opposition against the Congress. Raja Bhinga (Uday Pratap Singh) sought his assistance in the distribution of his pamphlet against the Congress in England. Kunwar Misr Harcharan of Bareilly wrote:

"I think you are aware of the Congressmen collecting subscriptions. My pleader P.N. Banerji brought me

two tickets of Rs. 50/- each which he requested me to buy saying that I should help in the movement as it was for the benefit of the whole country. I refused to do so and tried to explain the evils that might be the result of the Congress, but he insisted and said that he had collected subscriptions from other *Raises* of this city and that everyone favoured it, but privately, owing to the fear of the officials."

Jogendra Nath Dass, Kunwar Durga Prasad, Kunwar Narindar Bahadur, the Raja of Benares, and many other Hindus shared his views. The majority of Muslims accepted the lead given by him in the matter. It appears that for many years efforts were made, particularly by S. N. Banerjea, to persuade Sayyid Ahmad Khan to join the movement. In a letter dated November 25, 1878, S. N. Banerjea wrote: "But the deep interest you have all along felt in the Civil Service question leads me to think that you would welcome an opportunity to help us." He requested him to put his signature to a memorial regarding Civil Service to be presented to the House of Commons.

On May 4, 1885, when S. N. Banerjea wanted a deputation to wait upon the Viceroy, he approached him for help. "If the permission is granted, we may call at Allygurh to pay our respects to you." In another letter dated December 5, 1885, he asked him to attend a national conference at Calcutta and said: "No assembly of national delegates would be complete without your presence, and your views upon the important questions that will be discussed would be most welcome." He further said: "There will probably be a Parliamentary enquiry next year. We should set our own house in order and decide upon a common programme of political action by the mutual interchange of our views."

Sayyid Ahmad was, however, convinced that the time for political agitation had not come and that it was incumbent on all Indians, to whatever religion they might belong, to

concentrate all their energies on ceaseless activity to spread education and learning amongst the people.

Concern for the Welfare of All Indians

Sayyid Ahmad's opposition to the Congress was based on his personal appraisal of the situation. His approach was not conditioned by any communal consideration. He stood for Hindu-Muslim unity and harmony and had a concern for the welfare of all Indians. In a speech delivered at Patna on January 27, 1883, he said:

"Friends: Just as the high-caste Hindus came and settled down in this land once forgot where their earlier home was and considered India to be their own country, the Muslims also did exactly the same things—they also left their climes hundreds of years ago and they also regard this land of India as their very own.....Both my Hindu brethren and my Muslim co-religionists breathe the same air, drink the water of the sacred Ganga and the Jamuna, eat the products of the earth which God has given to this country, live and die together. Both of us have shed off our former dress and habits, and while Muslims have adopted numerous customs belonging to the Hindus, the Hindus have been vastly influenced by Muslim manners and customs. I say with conviction that if we were to disregard for a moment our conception of Godhead then in all matters of everyday life the Hindus and Muslims really belong to one nation (*qaum*)and the progress of the country is possible only if we have a union of hearts, mutual sympathy and love..... I have always said that our land of India is like a newly-wedded bride whose two beautiful and luscious eyes are the Hindus and the Musalmans; if the two exist in mutual concord the bride will remain for ever resplendent and becoming, while if they make up their mind to see in different

directions the bride is bound to become squinted and even partially blind."

In a speech delivered at Gurdaspur on January 27, 1884, he said:

"We (Hindus and Muslims) should try to become one heart and soul and act in unison; if united, we can support each other. If not, the effect of one against the other would tend to the destruction and downfall of both. In old historical books and traditions you will have read and heard and we see it even now, that all the people inhabiting one country are designated by the term one nation. The different tribes of Afghanistan are termed one nation, and so are the miscellaneous hordes peopling Iran, distinguished by the term Persians though abounding in variety of thoughts and religions, are still known as members of one nation, though people of other countries also do come and settle with them, but being mixed together they are called members of one and the same nation. So that from the oldest times the word nation is applied to the inhabitants of one country, though they differ in some peculiarities which are characteristic of their own. Hindu and Mahomedan brethren! Do you people any country other than Hindustan? Do you not inhabit the same land? Are you not burned and buried on the same soil? Do you not tread the same ground and live upon the same soil? Remember that the words Hindu and Mahomedan are only meant for religious distinction—otherwise all persons, whether Hindu or Mahomedan, even the Christians who reside in this country, are all in this particular respect belonging to one and the same nation. Then all these different sects can be described as one nation, they must each and all unite for the good of the country which is common to all."

The United Indian Patriotic Association

In 1888, Sayyid Ahmad formed the United Indian Patriotic Association. The aim of the Association was to publish pamphlets in English and acquaint the members of the British Parliament with the views of those Hindus and Muslims who did not agree with the Congress and its policies. Theodore Beck, Principal of the M.A.O. College, was one of the chief organizers of this Association. He wrote to Graham: "I have undertaken a heavy task against the so-called National Congress, and have formed an Association." It was a joint organization of the Hindus and the Muslims and this unity between the two communities, whatever its form, was gall and wormwood to Beck. In 1893, Beck founded another association, the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association of Upper India and himself took over the Secretaryship of this Association. Lest the Association become a forceful vehicle for the expression of public opinion, he laid down against the establishment of branches and holding of public meetings. The Association was thus intended, by Beck, to be a cell to carry on pro-British propaganda and prevent the Hindus and Muslims from coming together.

Opposition to India Council Bill of Bradlaugh

The introduction of the India Council Bill by Bradlaugh was another very significant event in Indian political life. Theodore Beck was opposed to it. He persuaded the students of the M.A.O. College to go out in deputations and batches and secure signatures of the Muslims against the proposed bill. It is further reported that at this time Beck secured the editorship of the *Ali-garh Institute Gazette* but the name of Beck does not appear as editor on the journal. However, Beck carried on a vigorous campaign against the Congress as well as against the Bengalis.

Tufail Ahmad has remarked that after 1884 it was Theodore Beck who controlled and guided the political

thought of Sayyid Ahmad. While Beck's influence on him has been definitely exaggerated, it can hardly be denied that Beck was very active during this time and wanted to use the Sayyid for his own political ends. Though Sayyid Ahmad's opposition to the Congress and its demand for representative institutions, etc., was based on his own analysis of the situation, Beck exploited the confidence reposed in him by the septuagenarian Muslim leader. While implementing the Sayyid's ideas, he gave a complexion to the campaign which Sayyid Ahmad Khan could not have approved. His greatest concern was education. He was of the opinion that since Muslims were educationally backward, it was not in their interest to get involved in anti-Government politics. In 1888, Maulvi Amir Ali saw him in Calcutta and requested him to join the Muhammadan National Conference, but Sayyid Ahmad Khan declined, because he thought that it was not in the interest of the Muslims to join any political agitation.

Pandit Nehru on Sayyid Ahmad's Political Role

Sayyid Ahmad's decision to eschew politics and concentrate on education was made after patient and careful study of the situation in which he found himself. "So, to this education," remarks Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "he turned all his energy trying to win over his community to his way of thinking. He wanted no diversions or distractions from other directions; it was a difficult enough piece of work to overcome the inertia and hesitation of the Muslims. The beginnings of a new nationalism, sponsored by the Hindu *bourgeoisie*, seemed to him to offer such a distraction, and he opposed it. The Hindus, half a century ahead in Western education, could indulge in this pastime of criticising the Government, but he had counted on the full cooperation of that Government in his educational undertakings and he was not going to risk this by any premature step. Sir Syed's decision to concentrate on Western education for Muslims was undoubtedly a right one. Without that they could not have played any effective part in the building up of Indian

nationalism of the new type, and they would have been doomed to play second fiddle to the Hindus with their better education and far stronger economic position. The Muslims were not historically or ideologically ready then for the *bourgeois* nationalist movement as they had developed no *bourgeoisie*, as the Hindus had done. Sir Syed's activities, therefore, although seemingly very moderate, were in the right revolutionary direction." As Pandit Nehru has pointed out, his decision to remain out of politics was largely correct. But this decision was correct only at the time it was taken and not for all time. "Sir Syed's message," rightly remarks Pandit Nehru, "was appropriate when it came, but it could not be the final ideal of a progressive community. It is possible that had he lived a generation later, he would have himself given another orientation to that message."⁹

⁹ *An Autobiography*, pp. 463-464.

CHAPTER X

LAST YEARS AND DEATH

Sayyid Ahmad's last years were marked by a feeling of personal achievement on the one hand, and a sense of grief and anxiety on the other. On the one hand, he saw the movement he had initiated take definite shape, and, on the other, he found himself confronted by two serious problems which completely broke down his aged nerves— first, the opposition of his close friends to the Trustee Bill and second, the embezzlement of college funds.

On January 22, 1884. Sayyid Ahmad—now in his 68th year—set out on a tour of the Punjab. It was a memorable event in his life—a mass recognition of his services to the country. The tremendous ovation which he received from the people of the Punjab—rich and poor. Hindus and Muslims, men and women, young and old—was unparalleled in the history of this country. It convinced the old leader, who had been working day and night for India's resurgence, that his voice had not been a cry in the wilderness. His exhortations had awakened the people from their profound slumber and they were anxious to make up the leeway. Nothing could give greater consolation to the aged Sayyid.

He visited Ludhiana, Jullundur, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Lahore and Patiala. Everywhere people and their associations—both Hindu and Muslim—presented valedictory addresses to him. The exuberance of public love and admiration for him touched its highest watermark when people insisted on pulling his carriage in procession. He did

not allow this but he was, obviously, deeply moved by these expressions of love and affection for him. When his train reached Kartarpur—which was not included in his itinerary—one Ram Chandra presented to him a sum of Rs. 8.9.0 which he had raised from the village school. The amount was no doubt paltry but the intensity of affection underlying it was immeasurable. He found in this donation the recognition of his movement by the poor Indian villagers and he acknowledged Ram Chandra's gift with a sense of gratefulness which he had not shown even to donors of thousands.

The Indian Association of Lahore paid tribute to him in the following words:

"Not the least remarkable feature of your public career has been the breadth of your views and your liberal attitude towards sections of the community other than your co-religionists. Your conduct throughout has been stainless of bias or bigotry. The benefits of the noble educational institution you have established at Aligarh are open alike to Hindus as well as Mahomedans. Our unhappy country is so split up with petty religious and sectarian jealousies and had suffered so much in the past from sectarian and religious dissensions, that the advent of a man of your large-hearted and liberal views is a matter of peculiar congratulation at this time. Long may you be spared to inculcate knowledge among Mahomedans and Hindus alike, and, by eradicating prejudice and bigotry from their minds, to unite them in the firm bonds of fraternal union."

It was an eloquent tribute to his great love and genuine concern for the welfare of all Indians. In 1888, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was decorated with the K.C.S.I. A formal function was arranged in the Aligarh Institute Hall on May 12, and the firman of the Queen was read out by the

Magistrate. The gentry of Aligarh arranged a reception in order to felicitate him on this occasion, but he refused to attend it saying that the economic condition of the people did not justify such a waste of money. In 1889, the degree of LL.D. was conferred *honoris causa* on him by the Edinburgh University. He valued it very much as recognition of his literary contributions by the West.

Sometime in 1883, Sayyid Ahmad fell seriously ill. As soon as he recovered, he thought it necessary to prepare a Trustee Bill so that the management of the college property might be vested in the Trustees and the danger of confusion and conflict after his death might be averted. In 1889, he drafted a document and circulated it amongst the members for their views. Maulvi Sami-ullah Khan, one of his close supporters and friends, objected to some of its clauses, particularly to the clause which contemplated making Sayyid Mahmud, son of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the joint secretary of the college. Maulvi Sami-ullah also succeeded in arousing the opposition of some other zamindars of Aligarh to the Bill. The draft was passed by an overwhelming majority but a group under Maulvi Sami-ullah Khan persisted in its opposition and this came as a great shock to Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the evening of his life. In 1895, he received another shock when the head clerk of the college forged his signatures and those of other trustees and drew from the bank, on different occasions an amount of Rs. 1,05,570. He felt completely broken down as the result of this unfortunate incident. "I cannot express in words what a severe shock it has been to me," he wrote to his friends. "For several days I was so overwhelmed by grief that there was fear of my developing some serious disease. For three days I did not take anything at all." Letters written by him during this period reveal his feelings of distress and agony at the loss suffered by the college.

Another tragedy which completely smashed him was the illness of his only son Sayyid Mahmud, a man of ex-

ceptional intellectual attainments. Sayyid Mahmud lost his balance of mind. This put the Sayyid's soul on the rack. He went down under the weight of this deep personal anguish. A couple of months before his death, he even stopped talking to people and would remain silent for hours. One day, Sayyid Zain-ul-Abidin Khan asked him: "Why do you keep mum all the time?" "The time is near when I shall have to remain silent for ever, I am therefore developing the habit of keeping silent," he replied.

But even in these last moments of grief and anxiety his mind was always brooding over some public problem. Only eight days before his death, he expressed his opinion about the language controversy which was raging in the country and communicated his views to a committee which was formed at Allahabad in support of the Urdu language. At this very time, there appeared a brochure which contained wild and malicious charges against the Prophet and his wives. This brochure was written by a Christian missionary. Sayyid Ahmad, who was now fast moving towards the grave, instantly reacted to it and started dictating a reply to this pamphlet. While he was busy over this article, on March 24, 1898, he fell ill. The Civil Surgeon of Aligarh and Dr. Muryati of Meerut attended upon him. They struggled hard to save him but his herculean frame, which had borne the brunt of private and public worries for about half a century, was damaged beyond all hope of recovery. On March 27, 1898, he breathed his last at the residence of Haji Isma'il Khan, where he had shifted from the house of his son a week or ten days before his death. Next day his body was laid to rest in the mosque of the college.

CHAPTER XI

PERSONALITY, IDEAS AND THEIR IMPACT

Sayyid Ahmad Khan is one of the most dynamic and resplendent personalities of the 19th century. At once a theologian, scholar, social reformer, educationist, politician, author and journalist, he contributed many essential elements to the resurgence of modern India. "Amongst the mighty forces," wrote a well-informed contemporary, "which have been silently changing the aspect of affairs in India during the last forty years, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's name will, to future generations, occupy a conspicuous place."¹ In fact, he was the first Muslim in modern India to catch a glimpse of the dynamic character of the coming age and he dedicated his whole life to what he thought to be the supreme need of the hour—the uplift of Indians by apprising them of the problems of the modern world. He ignored all hurdles in his way and strove, patiently and incessantly, to bring about a reorientation in the outlook and behaviour of the Indians, particularly the Muslims, who were more backward in education and learning than any other Indian community. He thus became a social and a moral force which accelerated the processes of transition from the medieval to the modern age.

"What the fall of lightning did with Martin Luther," wrote the editor of Sayyid Ahmad's speeches in 1890, "the Mutiny of 1857 did with Sayyid Ahmad Khan." It gave a new

¹ Graham, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, p. 267.

dimension to his personality and awakened his latent potentialities. He decided to work in order to educate the people and eradicate those habits, customs and superstitions which stood in the way of enlightenment and culture. He did not marry after the death of his wife in 1861 because he wanted to spend all his time in educating his illiterate countrymen. When he retired from Government service in 1876, he decided to devote all his time and energy to national work. He worked day and night for years in order to inculcate in the Indian mind an awareness of the requirements of the modern age and the need and urgency to acquire Western knowledge and learning. He said again and again that he did not want to produce mere clerks—he aimed at building up a nation, enlightened, progressive and well-equipped to meet the challenge of time. This became the inspiring motive of his life. It was a gigantic task in the fulfilment of which he had to face opposition from many a quarter. He was misunderstood, suspected of sinister motives, condemned, reviled, abused and excommunicated for his views which were anathema to a society sunk in superstition, obscurantism and medievalism. But nothing could deter him and every invective hurled at him convinced him of the need and validity of his mission in life. Sometimes he would longingly say: "Perhaps after me a day would come when people would realize what an agonizing concern I had for them."

Sayyid Ahmad was magnificently endowed by nature. A herculean frame, with broad and pensive forehead, compassionate but thoughtful eyes, leonine jaw and a white flowing beard, when he walked his majestic gait gave the impression of "a ship in motion"².

He possessed rare personal qualities which endeared him to all those who came in contact with him. His polite

² Abdul Haq, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, p. 30.

demeanour and suavity of manners, coupled with a marvellous power of swaying the minds of men, added to the impact of his personality. Many of his bitter critics turned into loyal followers and devoted friends when they came close to him. Hali once said: "My heart used to fly even from the bewitching young beauties, but this old man captured it in a single glance." Indians apart, even Europeans felt the magnetic pull of his personality. Addressing a condolence meeting on his death, Theodore Beck remarked: "His talents were very great, but his character was greater still. I have never in England or India been brought into contact with a man who roused in me such feelings of respect and admiration."

Daily Routine: Sayyid Ahmad used to get up at four in the morning and soon afterwards plunged into his work. Nothing could ever disturb his routine. Except during illness, he never enjoyed mid-day rest. Sometimes due to continuous and strenuous work for hours, his legs and feet became swollen. What sustained him in the midst of these strenuous and exacting engagements and pre-occupations was his sense of mission and his buoyant nature. He performed his work in the same spirit in which a religious devotee engages himself in prayer and penitence. He looked upon service of the people as his highest duty and never allowed despondency or pessimism to cloud his vision. He was always full of wit and humour and kept an atmosphere of lively buoyancy and good cheer around him. One is simply staggered when one looks at the complexity and diversity of demands on his time. Besides literary pursuits, which continued throughout his life, he attended to every minute matter relating to the college—he prepared its budget, drafted reports for submission to the Government, prepared agenda for the meetings of the Trustees and also prepared the proceedings of these meetings. He personally carried on all correspondence with the Government, the Education department, the parents of students, and the

Trustees of the college. He maintained the accounts, entered the daily returns of income and expenditure in the diary and corresponded with the bank. Besides, he prepared plans for the buildings of the college and then supervised their construction and even the inscriptions on the college buildings were written by him. Over and above this was the responsibility of collecting funds for the college. It was an exacting task and he used all possible means— persuasion through speeches, letters, statements in press, setting up of a book-stall at an exhibition and even staging a play in which he himself appeared as one of the actors. To keep himself fully in touch with the reactions of his co-religionists, the Government and other Indian communities, to his various projects, he carefully studied newspapers and journals and wrote articles and issued statements on almost every important issue. He always had a printing press by his side which helped him immensely in disseminating his views. He published his *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq*, *The Institute Gazette* and proceedings of various bodies in this press under his own supervision. He corrected the proofs himself and then dispatched them to the persons concerned. He personally maintained the sale accounts of all the books published by the college and took great pains in pushing their sale. All the receptions in the college were organized by him. He looked into every detail personally: wrote addresses, got them translated into English, arranged their printing and then sent reports of functions to the newspapers. On the eve of the annual sessions of the Muhammadan Educational Conference, he was the busiest of men because he looked to every detail of the arrangements personally. But none of these pre-occupations could prevent him from replying personally to every letter which he received. His friend and biographer Maulana Hali used to say that he did not remember a single occasion when he did not receive a reply to his letter on the third or the fourth day. Such was Sayyid Ahmad Khan! From early morning till late into the night he

was busy in his work, like a giant determined to attain his ideals and objects. His inexhaustible energy puzzled his friends.

His House: Sayyid Ahmad Khan lived in a house which his son Sayyid Mahmud had purchased and furnished for him. He lived there for many years and left it only 10 days before his death.³ Graham thus describes the atmosphere of this house:

"The whole atmosphere is redolent of literature. His sitting room, in which he passes most of the day at the desk, is full of books and papers; the walls of his dining room are covered with book cases filled with standard English works; and his library—a splendid room—is stocked with a vast variety of books, including numerous theological works used by him in writing his commentary on the Bible, Koran, etc. One of the not least interesting books to me is Syed Mahmud's prize taken at Cambridge for the best English essay! In the drawing room is the diploma making Syed Ahmad a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, of which he is particularly proud."⁴

Sincerity and Devotion: The most striking feature of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's character was his sincerity. "A great, deep and genuine sincerity", says Carlyle, "is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic." He was very sincere in his thought and in his actions. He captivated the hearts of his friends and even impressed his enemies by his scintillating sincerity.

³ Sayyid Mahmud had become an addict to wine and had thereby lost the balance of his mind. Distressed and pained at his erratic behaviour, Sayyid Ahmad Khan left the house just when he was to close his eyes for ever.

⁴ Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. p. 265.

Few men have shown such altruism and selflessness as Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He lived for others and dedicated his time, energy, money, influence and everything to the cause of the people. Professor Arnold very pathetically remarked on his death: "A nobler life, more void of self-seeking, more devoted to truth, to the service of others; it has never been my privilege to come in contact with. Where shall we find one like him?"

When he went out to beg money from the people for his educational programmes, he had already exhausted all his personal resources over them. To the Scientific Society alone, he gave more than ten thousand rupees. Besides, though he travelled extensively for the collection of funds, he never charged anything towards his travelling expenses. He bore all the expenses from his own pocket and others who accompanied him also did the same. He set the highest standards of integrity and honesty in the matter of public funds. "Sometimes I think," he wrote to a well-wisher, "that friends would think that I have vexed them by persistent appeals for funds and it has become difficult for them to get rid of me.....But whatever I do (and whatever I ask for) is not for my person, it is for God's sake and therefore I should not care for it."

Magnanimity: Magnanimity was deeply ingrained in his nature. He never entertained a petty thought and was incapable of bearing malice towards anybody. "He was incomparably the noblest man", remarked Beck, "whom it has been my fortune to have ever met intimately." He never nursed a grievance even against those who carried on campaigns of vilification against him, or even tried to implicate him in criminal cases. It was the advice of his mother which made retribution and revenge a taboo with him. He would forgive and forget his enemies and would even advise his friends to do the same. "Bhai Sirajuddin", he writes to a friend, "God has created us in this world to wish well to all and sundry. What have we got to do with the

vices of those who commit wrongs? We should keep our heart, our work, our tongue—everything clean. We should be sorry for the wicked and for those who do not wish well to us. But doing any thing more, is to place oneself in the category of those who commit wrongs. We should be patient and enduring towards those who speak ill of us." His magnanimous character immensely raised his stature in the eyes of his contemporaries.

Perseverance: Sayyid Ahmad was a man of great resolution and perseverance. When he set his mind on anything and was convinced of its validity he never allowed any consideration or difficulty to stand in his way. When he pitched his tent on the site of the old barracks at Aligarh, where according to Professor Arnold, the wolves howled at night, and spread out before his friends the plans of his future college, they laughed at him. But undeterred by their taunts and ridicule, he pursued his schemes vigorously and with a singleness of purpose. Though he gave his supporters and followers every opportunity to express their views he did not tolerate criticism which obstructed his work. "I am not offended by one who gives an opinion opposite to mine but by one who adopts a line of opposition (against my schemes)," he wrote to Nawab Viqar-ul Mulk in a letter.

Self-Respect: "Sir Sayyid's life", remarks one of his biographers, "set before us the high example of self-help, self-sacrifice and self-reverence."⁵ He is sometimes accused of flattery towards the Englishmen, but this charge can hardly stand the test of scrutiny. His decision to co-operate with the Englishmen was the result of a careful analysis of the situation. He believed that the British raj gave an opportunity to extricate the people from mediævalism and to prepare a ground for the development of Western sciences in India. With this conviction he gave full co-operation to the

⁵ *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, Natesan series, p. 1.

British but he was very particular about his self-respect and few Indians could behave in such bold and audacious manner as he did on occasions when his feeling of self-respect received the slightest injury.

When he was in England, Sir William Muir, then Lt.Governor of N.W. Provinces, contradicted one of his statements in a strain which gave the impression that he thought that Sayyid Ahmad Khan had deliberately made an incorrect statement. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was so much offended that he did not see the Lt.Governor on his return from England, and when the latter expressed a desire to see him, he wrote to him about his grievance and the Lt.Governor apologized for his remark. If Sayyid Ahmad Khan ever came to know about the rude behaviour of any English officer towards the Indians, he ignored him completely. He left the Agra Durbar of 1867 indignantly because the organizers had made some distinction in the seating arrangement for the Indians and the Englishmen.

Courage of Convictions: Sayyid Ahmad Khan had remarkable courage of convictions. He could never make any compromise with his conscience whatever the consequences. He exhorted his friends also to do the same. He wrote his booklet *Causes of the Indian Revolt* when few could even think of saying a word on the subject. He expressed his views boldly, candidly and without fear or favour. When he wrote on religious themes, he offended many of his co-religionists but he never hesitated in speaking out what he considered to be right.

Religious Tolerance: In religious matters Sayyid Ahmad Khan stood for tolerance, broad-mindedness and catholicity of views. "In my opinion", he used to say, "fanaticism and bigotry are against the Divine injunctions. Bigotry is opposed to the Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and is also the negation of true human spirit. A fanatical and exclusive approach can never be of any guidance to others.

It can breed hatred only."⁶ While appointing a religious instructor for students of the M.A.O. College, he laid down several conditions for this appointment. A religious instructor should be able to teach by the example of his character and personality. He should inculcate real religious spirit and should not create an atmosphere of casuistry in the classes. He should further be particularly careful not to create any unpleasantness between the Shias and the Sunnis.

Mystic Influences: Though Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a rationalist in religious matters, the mystic influence had definitely contributed towards the make-up of his personality. His adherence to the highest ethical and moral principles, his reluctance to retaliate and wreak vengeance for wrongs done to him, and above all his interpretation of religion as service to humanity represent in the most explicit manner the impact of Muslim mystic traditions of India on him. He had profound respect for Shah Ghu-lam Ali, a great Naqshbandi saint of Delhi. He had even thought of visiting the tomb of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi Mujaddid-i-Alf-i Sani in his old age, eight years before his death.

An Eastern of the East: Sayyid Ahmad's education was medieval and Oriental. He never received any formal instruction in English but by sheer dint of personal effort he gained some smattering of the language and was able to understand and speak a few sentences. "He was a remarkable product of Oriental learning," writes the author of his biography in the Natesan series, "whatever noble work Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ranade and Dadabhai Naoroji had done in the cause of India in their respective spheres is not, in one sense, a matter for great surprise for they were masters of the English language and had drunk deep at the fountain-heads of Western civilization and culture. In Sir Syed's case it was different. It

⁶ Khutut-i Sir Sayyid, p. 175.

is certainly to his credit that, although ignorant of English and other European languages, he mastered the principles of the British constitution and the principles of Occidental jurisprudence so perfectly. Brought up as an Oriental scholar, he rose to be the apostle of English learning amongst his co-religionists."⁷

Sayyid Ahmad Khan no doubt wanted the Indians to adopt Western education and acquire proficiency in Western science, literature and technology, but he never advised them to break completely with their past or lose faith in the achievements of their forefathers. He was critical of the intellectual isolation which was bound to spell ruin to the Muslim community. At the same time he was proud of his historical heritage and when Ghalib tried to belittle the achievements of Akbar before the achievements of the British rule, he resented it. *St. James' Budget* once wrote: "Syed Ahmad is an example of the singular phenomenon of modern time—the Asiatic radical. He is an Eastern of the East; and this is what makes his perfect justness of mind, his zeal for the spread of knowledge, and his loyalty and truthfulness so interesting. Students of Indian history will recognize in these qualities the inheritance that the descendant of Syed Hadi of Herat draws from the fine race that produced Baber and Akbar the Great, perhaps the most enlightened and tolerant ruler possessed of absolute power that the world has known."⁸

Educational Ideals: His aim in the establishment of the M.A.O. College was to help the Indians, particularly the Muslims, get over their backwardness and attain a position of honour and respect in the family of nations. When Lord Lytton laid the foundation-stone of this college, Sayyid Ahmad gave expression to his earnest hopes in these words:

⁷ Sir Syed Ahmad. pp. 2-3.

⁸ October 31, 1885.

"That this college may expand into a university, whose sons shall go forth throughout the length and breadth of the land to preach the gospel of free enquiry, of largehearted toleration, and of a pure morality."⁹

Discussing his educational ideals, Maulana Muhammad Ali once remarked:

"After a careful study of men and things and books, after a long and eventful life which bridged the gulf between two orders of things, the Old and the New, after many practical experiments with a view to diagnose the disease of his countrymen and especially of his co-religionists, and provide for it a suitable remedy, he resolved upon creating in India a university, not of the existing type of Indian universities, but like the typical English institutions of Oxford and Cambridge, where he found, during his visit to Europe, the future statesmen, generals and poets of England, unconsciously shaping their own destinies, and perhaps the destinies of more than one country, in the lecture-rooms of Balliol, and the chapel of King's, on Fenner's cricket ground, and the shady backwaters of the Cherwell."¹⁰

If all his speeches and articles are taken into consideration, it would appear that what pained him most was not ignorance or illiteracy, but lack of character amongst the Indians. He insisted as much on character-building as on learning. In his educational programme, the building up of character had a greater value than mere instruction in textbooks. "Syed Ahmad's ideal was", remarks Maulana

⁹ *Institute Gazette*, January 12, 1877. p. 9.

¹⁰ *The Proposed Mohamedan University, Bombay* 1904, p. 6.

Muhammad Ali, "a gentleman rather than a scholar."¹¹ Nothing can be farther from the truth than to say that his educational ideal was merely to produce clerks for the Government. He wanted to create an enlightened nation, educated, cultured and progressive. He exhorted the Indians to exploit the infinite possibilities of development and progress presented by science and technology. He considered service to be the worst of vocations and recommended trade and agriculture as the keys to the progress of a country. It is interesting to note that as early as in the 19th century, the development of agriculture on scientific lines in the country was seriously considered by him. One of the objects of the Scientific Society was to find out effective methods of agriculture. He wrote to Messrs. Smith Elder and Co., London to engage an engineer for him for preparing a book on farming.

Considered in the broad perspective of Islamic history, Sayyid Ahmad's educational movement was a unique experiment of its kind. In its valedictory address to him, the *Anjuman-i-Islamia* of Jullundur said:

"There were great educational establishments in Turkey and Spain when the Mahomedans were in power, but they were maintained at state expense. In these days we know of no instance among our countrymen, of any one attempting to establish an institution by the charitable contributions of the public, and this you only have succeeded in doing and for this great deed your name will run down in history and posterity will turn to you a reverential eye."

This was no overstatement. Even in the 19th century, the modernist movements in the Muslim countries were initiated and sustained by the Governments of those countries. In Egypt it was the Government which set up institutions for

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

Western education, arranged for translations of standard European works, introduced the press and newspapers, and sent its students for higher education to Europe. In 1849, 311 Egyptian scholars were receiving higher education at state expense in Italy, France and England. In Iraq and Syria the modernist movements were initiated by those English and French people who had settled there. In Turkey Sultan Selim III, Sultan Mahmud and Sultan Abdul Hamid were responsible for all such schemes of modernization. What in other countries the Governments alone had undertaken, Sayyid Ahmad Khan undertook to perform himself in India.

Political Role: His political role is generally presented as reactionary and communal. But a cool and impartial assessment of his work does not corroborate this view. Just after the upheaval of 1857, he had demanded Indian representation in councils and had claimed freedom of speech as an inalienable right of man. Thirty years of close and careful study of the Indian character and conditions, however, led him to the painful conclusion that without adequate education all talk of Indian participation in administration and legislation was nothing more than self-deception. He rejected political agitation as dangerous and concentrated on education as a necessary pre-requisite to all political progress. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's remark that "Sir Syed's decision to concentrate on Western education for Muslims was undoubtedly a right one. Without that they could not have played any effective part in the building up of Indian nationalism", is based on a very sound and correct assessment of his political approach.

Sayyid Ahmad's opposition to the Congress was not on communal but on practical grounds. He believed that if the Congress demands were accepted, at a time when there was great disparity in the level of education among various sections and communities of India, there would be great imbalance in the life of the country. He was supported by

some Hindus also in his opposition to the Congress.

This aspect of the question apart, his refusal to co-operate with the Indian National Congress came as a great surprise to the Indian leaders who were agitating for political rights. Lala Lajpat Rai's open letters to him reflect such feelings of painful surprise and disgust, though the Lala belonged to a family which had profound admiration for 'the grand old man of Aligarh'. On March 3, 1887, A. O. Hume sought an interview with Sayyid Ahmad so that "the growing antagonisms" might be softened. It is not known whether any meeting took place, but his views remained unchanged. One of the contributory factors which made him adamant in his views was the Urdu-Hindi controversy which had created an unhappy atmosphere in the country. According to his friend and biographer Maulana Hali it was the language agitation which effected a change in his political outlook. Some hold Theodore Beck, Principal of the M.A.O. College, responsible for directing his mind in anti-Congress channels. While all these factors might have played, in varying degrees, some part in shaping the political outlook and approach of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, it can hardly be denied that the decision to eschew all agitational politics was basically his own and it was based on his appraisal of the situation.

Cosmopolitan Outlook: Sayyid Ahmad was a man of cosmopolitan views and his movement for social reform and educational advancement was not narrow or sectional in its spirit. That he mainly worked amongst the Muslims was due to the fact that he found them more backward, ignorant and lethargic than the other Indian communities. Throughout his life he worked in collaboration with Hindus who did not hesitate to give him all possible help, material and moral. When he was incharge of the famine relief operations at Moradabad, his great concern for the destitutes irrespective of their religion elicited praise from Raja Jai Kishan Das who, till that time, did not know him personally. When he

was disgusted with the Christian missionary activities, he thought of founding a joint orphanage for the Hindu and the Muslim boys. The appeal issued by him at the time of the establishment of the Scientific Society in 1863, was addressed "to all people of India" and he strove to bring Hindus and Muslims on a common platform. When in 1864, he founded a *madrasa* at Ghazipur, Raja Dev Narain Singh laid its foundation-stone and side by side with Persian and Arabic he made arrangements for the teaching of Sanskrit. When he established the M.A.O. College at Aligarh he kept its doors open to the Hindus. He admitted Hindu boys and recruited Hindu staff. There can be no greater compliment to the catholicity of his movement than the fact that the first graduate of the M.A.O. College was a Hindu. Sir William Hunter, President of the Education Commission, thus remarked about the institution he had founded:

".....the Mohamedan founders of this strictly Mohamedan institution have thrown open their door to the youth of all races and creeds. Among the 259 students, I find 57 Hindus, or nearly a fourth of the whole. Christian and Parsi lads have also received a liberal education within its walls. This liberality of mind pervades not only its rules and its teaching, but the whole life of this place."

On April 20, 1873. John Murray Kennedy wrote to Sayyid Ahmad Khan that if he desired to collect subscriptions from England, he could issue a short circular in which "the difficulties of the Hindoos joining with the Muhammadans owing to the religious rites of the former might be touched upon."¹² Sayyid Ahmad Khan turned down his suggestion because it ran counter to the very spirit of his movement. In 1882, when some Muslims of Amritsar offered a gold medal to be awarded to a Muslim student who

¹² Aligarh Documents, p. 247.

passed the B.A. examination in the first division, Sayyid Ahmad immediately wrote to H. Siddons, the Principal of the College: "I offer a gold medal from my pocket to the Hindu student who may pass the next B.A. examination in the first division."¹³ Thus throughout his life, Sayyid Ahmad Khan stood for Hindu-Muslim amity and strove for the betterment of the Indian people as a whole. There is no doubt that his impact was the deepest on the Muslims. He left an imprint of his personality on their literature, social life, education, politics and religion. *The Englishman* was correct when it remarked that his "life strikingly illustrates one of the best phases of modern Indian history".¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 286.

¹⁴ November 17, 1885.

APPENDIX A

CHORONOLOGY

October 17,	1817	Birth at Delhi
	1828	Death of Khwaja Fariduddin, maternal grandfather
	1837	<i>Sayyid-ul-Akhbar</i> started by Sayyid Muhammad khan
	1838	Death of his father, Sayyid Muhammad Muttaqi
February	1839	Appointed <i>Naib Munshi</i> at Agra
December 24,	1841	Appointed <i>Munsif</i> at Mainpuri
January 10,	1842	Transferred from Mainpuri to Fatehpur Sikri
	1842	Received the title of <i>Jawad-ud-Daula Arif Jung</i> from the Mughal court
	1842	Completed <i>Jula-ul-Qutub bi Zikr il Mahbub</i>
	1844	Completed <i>Tuhfa-i-Hasan</i> and <i>Tashil fi jar-i-Saqil</i>
	1845	Death of Sayyid Muhammad Khan, his brother
	1847	First Edition of <i>Asar-us-Sanadid</i> appeared
	1849	Completed <i>Kalamat-ul-Haqq</i>
	1850	Completed <i>Risala Sunnat dar radi bid`at</i>
	1852	Completed <i>Namiqa dar bayan masala tasawwur-i-Shaikh</i> and <i>Sil-silat ul- Mulk</i>
	1854	Second edition of <i>Asar-us-Sanadid</i>
January 13,	1855	Appointed permanent <i>Sadr Amin</i> at Bijnor
	1855	Edited <i>A'in-i-Akbari</i>
May 10,	1857	Revolt breaks out
	1857	Death of his mother at Meerut
April	1858	Appointed <i>Sadr us Sadur</i> , Moradabad
	1858	Published <i>Tarikh Sarkashi-i-Zilla</i> Bijnor

	1859	Nominated member of special commission for hearing appeals about confiscated property
	1859	Published <i>Causes of the Indian Revolt</i>
	1859	Established a <i>madrassa</i> at Moradabad
	1860	Published <i>Loyal Muhammadans of India</i>
	1860	Famine in N.W. Provinces and relief work by Sayyid Ahmad Khan
	1861	French translation of <i>Asar-us-Sanadid</i> by Garcin de Tassy
	1861	Death of his wife
May 12,	1862	Transferred to Ghazipur
	1862	Edited <i>Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi</i>
	1863	Published a pamphlet on education
	1864	Laid the foundation of a <i>madrassa</i> at Ghazipur
	1864	Transferred to Aligarh
July 4,	1864	Elected Honorary Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain
December 30,	1865	Sends a memorandum to the Government about the intention of the Scientific Society to publish books on agriculture
	1866	<i>Aligarh Institute Gazette</i> started
August 1,	1867	Sends a memorandum to the Viceroy for establishment of a vernacular university
August 15,	1867	Transferred to Benares
September 25,	1867	Started homoeopathic dispensary and hospital at Benares
April 1,	1869	Leaves Benares for England
August 6,	1869	Receive the insignia of C.S.I.
September 4,	1870	Left London for India
October 2,	1870	Reached Bombay
December 24,	1870	<i>Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq</i> started
December 26,	1870	Established the Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among Muhammadans of India
February	1873	Scheme for establishing a college Presented
May 24,	1875	Inauguration of the College
June 1,	1875	Regular teaching starts at the M.A.O. College
	1876	Retired from service
	1876	Starts writing commentary on the <i>Qur'an</i>
January 8,	1877	Lord Lytton's visit to Aligarh

	1878	Nominated member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council
	1882	Appears before the Education Commission
	1883	Founded Muhammadan Civil Service Fund Association
	1883	Established Muhammadan Association, Aligarh
	1886	Established Muhammadan Education Conference
	1887	Nominated member of the Civil Service Commission by Lord Dufferin
August	1888	Established Patriotic Association at Aligarh
	1888	Received K.C.S.I.
	1889	Received the degree of L.L.D. <i>honoris causa</i> from Edinburgh
	1889	Circulates the Trustee Bill
March 27,	1898	Death at Aligarh

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The author of this book, Prof. Khalique Ahmad Nizami was a renowned historian and retired as the Head of the Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.



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